

**MERELY GOTHIC IN DISGUISE? DISCONTINUITY,
CONTINUITY AND THE AESTHETICS
OF BRITISH MODERNISM**

BY

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**PhD
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
1992**





DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the research therein has been conducted by myself unless otherwise indicated.

Christopher John Yates Fletcher

Edinburgh, January 30th, 1992

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My research at the University of Edinburgh has been made possible by a Major State Studentship (1988-1991) from the British Academy. I am grateful to them and to my family for the financial help I have received.

I am indebted to my supervisor, Cairns Craig, for the interest he has taken in every stage of this work and for his clarifying conversation and advice. Thanks also to Darren Brierton for his technical help, discussion and general encouragement. I am grateful to the staff of the National Library of Scotland for their efficient assistance throughout. Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my friends, family and cat for all their patience and support.

ABSTRACT

The ideology of early British Modernism, as derived by Eliot and Pound primarily from the writings of T.E. Hulme, is focused on a valorization of the Primitive, Byzantine or 'Classical' (objective) and a rejection of the Romantic (subjective). In Hulme's work, however, it can be shown that this opposition is based on a fundamental misreading of one of his principal sources – Wilhelm Worringer, a contradiction the wider aesthetic significances of which were being referenced at the time by the English aesthete Vernon Lee. For Worringer, although asserting the importance of abstraction and objectivity in art, linked those aspects with the need for an equal subjectivity and emotionalism (or empathy), a union which he felt to be fulfilled in traditions of Northern Gothic art which stood as an equivalent to the formalist traditions which held such sway with early Modernist poets.

Worringer's influential texts provide a means of seeing the development of Modernism in Britain not as being in discontinuity with the thought which preceded and followed it, but as the continuous development and refinement of a single set of aesthetic issues stemming from Kant and Hegel and in debate among theorists of the early twentieth century. A broad context of neo-Romantic poets, painters and writers like David Jones, Paul Nash, John Piper and members of movements such as The New Apocalypse, all of whom are often argued to be in direct opposition to Modernism, can thus be seen to be the product of the working out of the consequences of an initial position which, in the works of theorists like Jacques Maritain, came to realize its own incompleteness.

Modernism in Britain, under the influence of art-historians like Worringer and theorists such as Maritain, moves steadily from abstraction and objectivity to an attempt to fulfil the aesthetics of Northern Gothic, in which abstract pattern and natural forms are fused into a unity of the subjective and objective, the experiential and the ideal. This Northern Gothic is not a rejection of the modern and the Modernist, but its logical synthetic conclusion, the product of a continuous rereading and redefinition of the central terms from which Hulme began.

This thesis provides a detailed exploration of these debates in the theories of Hulme, Lee, Worringer and Maritain and of the influence of their ideas on British writing from early Modernism till the 1950s. Focusing on the case of David Jones, the New Apocalypse poets and the neo-Romantic painterly and literary-critical contexts of the 1930s and 1940s, it argues for a specifically British Modernism, which develops by

stressing those aspects of a Modernist aesthetic which were suppressed in Hulme's misreading of Worringer, and developed in the ideas of Vernon Lee. This Modernism is local and even nationalistic (rather than cosmopolitan), precisely because it sees itself as 'making new' not a tradition stemming from far removed, anti-humanist instances of literature and art, but the underlying melioristic union of the abstract and the natural, the subjective and the objective, that was for Worringer the central tradition of Northern European Gothic art.

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INTRODUCTION

In his critical pathology of English Modernism, *A Sinking Island*, Hugh Kenner records how the 'third province' and linguistic originator of a credible 'International Modernism' 'became a headquarters for articulate Philistia'.¹ In distinction to America and Ireland, Kenner is referring to England: refuge for 'tight little islanders' where the innovative endeavours of the early Pound-Eliot generation had collapsed by the middle of the century into a centreless diaspora rendering all voices peripheral and all concerns parochial.

According to Kenner, the important poets who remained on this lost island (or exiled themselves to it) had to make do without a cogent and meaningful literary context to enforce the validity of their work. Basil Bunting, for instance, features prevalently in Kenner's study not as a subject whose work may be understood or appreciated in its own right but conversely, by the critics own admission, 'to throw light on mid-century norms that couldn't accommodate him' (p.7). In fact, given the mid-century news that 'there's no longer an English Literature' (p.245), nothing can be said of it, only elaborations made upon its absence. Therefore, for instance, performing a role-call of The New Apocalypse writers Henry Treece, G.S. Fraser, George Barker and Vernon Watkins, Kenner provides no exegesis of their thought but asks 'who are they?' (p.232), unable to answer a question he himself could only conclude as meaningless. Conversely, any poet seemingly intent upon self-negation – such as Philip Larkin – is given space to say his nothings: for such cultivated vacuity is the position Kenner, in deliberately contentious fashion, takes to be paradigmatic of succeeding generations increasingly and forever removed from the intellectual primacy of early high Modernism.

And given this vacuum at the centre, this lack of hieratic sense, Kenner can assert, for example, that 'nothing ever contained, or can account for, so disparate a quartet as Hill, Jones, Charles Tomlinson, Basil Bunting: nothing save a common devotion, in utterly disparate idioms, to the past of England. That's a symptom too, that need to reclaim – affirm – a past' (p.245). Such a need is symptomatic of what? For Kenner, it is again a lack of real aesthetic context. Without an audience able or willing to understand the Modernist idiom it had disinterestedly passed over, there began the necessity to recreate an idealized past in, as he puts it with reference to David Jones, a 'curial homemade language' (p.245).

What, however, if the need to reclaim or affirm the idea of 'pastness' were not a mid-century reaction to contemporary reader indifference or loss of artistic direction as Kenner suggests, but an aesthetic continuity which could be traced back to the very core of early Modernist philosophy? For if Kenner's argument suggests that a figure such as David Jones – who gains but one reference in this entire historiography of Modernist ideas – is liable to sink without a trace having slipped all critical moorings, it is my case that by shifting the critical parameters applied to a reading of British Modernism in the first half of the twentieth century he, along with many other 'little islanders', can be reconciled to a tradition considered by its exponents not to be in disintegration, but in dynamic progress.

'So the centers drift apart, beyond the range of synoptic viewing' (p.245). Is it really the case that after the revelatory International Modernism (Joyce, Eliot, Pound) of the early twentieth century we can only, like Kenner, echo Yeats in an affirmation that (literary) history ended 'all mere anarchy is loosed upon the world' that is England? My thesis tries to throw such an argument into reverse, and by so doing to recover the importance of a literary and artistic context which is only just emerging from a general critical ellipsis. For it is my contention that the generally appraised philosophy of International Modernism depends not upon the making of something new – as its self-advertisement might have us believe – but upon the subtle manipulation of a long-prevailing Romantic tradition of aesthetics. When, therefore, the mid-century saw the 'little islanders' assiduously devoting themselves to the recovery of these sources it might be supposed that, far from diluting the impact of the cruelly fated inspirations of high Modernism, they were merely returning it to its proper self. Thus a buoyant 'centre' can no longer be predicated of the anti-Romantic doctrines of early Modernists but must be relocated amongst a succeeding generation of artists and writers whose interest in, for example, topography, the past, ecclesiology, psychology and race can no longer define them as reactionary, provincial, parochial, peripheral or marginal but, on the contrary, as the emissaries of a salvaged tradition.

This study attempts a careful discrimination between two conceptions of Modernism: the first position, upheld by the early Modernists and canonized by their own and subsequent critical validations, argues for a necessarily anti-Romantic approach to aesthetics; a later position, which defines much of the literature and art towards the middle of the century, argues its relation to a Romantic tradition. Moreover, the exponents of the latter position argue the supremely ironic case, which I endorse, retrieve and re-present, that implicit in the preceding position – the objectivist

position of the early Modernism – is the very Romanticism it had so fervently sought to deny.

Thus for the artists and writers coming after the initial Modernist clamour of T.E. Hulme, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and so on, there is no question of one tradition replacing another which is discontinuous to it; instead there is felt the need to discriminate between the validity of two different positions held within one embracing philosophical discourse – and that a Romantic one. And this is the critical point: if the Modernism which, in its nascent formulation, heralds itself as a reaction to all subjective aesthetics can be redirected by a succeeding generation towards what is considered a naturally Romantic position, then perhaps contemporary criticism need not suppose either that ‘Eliot or Pound never happened’ (a cavil raised by Donald Davie),² nor, indeed, that they were the only thing that ever happened. Between the critical polarization which has come to place a loosely defined and suspiciously regarded mid-century ‘neo-Romanticism’ in one camp and the valorized formalist efforts of the early twentieth century in another, there is a position which allows us to argue for a hitherto hidden continuity.

It is my case that the Modernist tradition in British – not ‘English’ – art and literature is founded from the beginning upon one informing tradition of dialectical aesthetics; given this fact, an epistemological continuity can be traced throughout the various theories seeking to justify such visually antipathetic forms as, on the one hand, Jacob Epstein’s monumental sculptural abstraction *The Rock Drill* of 1913-14 (Fig. 1) and, on the other hand, David Jones’s watercolour *Vexilla Regis* of 1948 (Fig. 2). In 1987 both artists found themselves represented in and excluded from two major British art exhibitions: David Jones found a place in the Barbican’s neo-Romantic exhibition, yet was excluded from the Royal Academy’s major retrospective of British Modernism. Epstein’s *The Rock Drill* was the Academy’s show-piece, the sculptor’s more organic efforts ignored in the Barbican agenda. Now, the Epstein sculpture, with its geometrical, mechanical quality satisfies the early Modernist desire, put by its greatest indigenous spokesman T.E. Hulme, ‘to turn the organic into something hard and durable’,³ whereas the painting by Jones, conversely, appeals to our sympathy for an indisputably Romantic nature. One expression aims to alienate our human interest by asserting the abstract, formal necessity of the object itself, while the other seeks to involve our participation in a mythical, psychological and organic content. Represented are the two apparently antagonistic poles of Modernism which can be stated, respectively, as objectivity and subjectivity. One example from the early phase of

Modernism, another from what appears to be a different sensibility altogether – both, however, linked by their relation to an originating philosophical source.

And this source may be chased by submitting the theories of T.E. Hulme to scrutiny. Hulme's ideas were influential in London from the first decade of the twentieth century right through to the 1930s, if not, in some cases, beyond. Dying on the Western front in 1917, his ideology gained impetus from the posthumous publication of *Speculations*, an encapsulation of the early Modernist manifesto. Among those he influenced, or for whom his general theories spoke, may be counted Wyndham Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Jacob Epstein. It was he who introduced the idea of 'abstraction' into British art and poetry, drawing an exemplary analogy between the transcendental religiosity of primitive form and the idiomatic necessities demanded by a contemporary aesthetic tired, as he saw it, of a long-prevailing anthropomorphism. Eliot's famous literary-critical position on the required 'impersonality' of the poet may be attributed, at least in part, to the success of Hulme's propaganda for a return to ascetic values which held that man, cast in his ineluctable capacity as original sinner, should subserve an external absolute and not give lyrical projection to his own subjective genius.

These eschatological theories would appear to be irreconcilable with the later art, poetry and literary criticism of Herbert Read, Geoffrey Grigson, David Jones, Paul Nash, John Piper – even Wyndham Lewis – who, in order to progress forwards, looked backwards beyond the formalism of a preceding register to Romantic archetypes such as William Blake or Samuel Palmer. But the Romantic reprieve which attained its apogee by the middle of the century could do so within the parameters of the philosophy which had served T.E. Hulme with his ostensibly anti-Romantic apparatus; for Hulme's position depended upon the abstraction of one epistemological pole from a dialectical position founded by Immanuel Kant in his *Third Critique*, given analogical structure by Hegel and re-phrased for a modern audience by the German art-historian and aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer. The dialectic in question argues that, although every aesthetic act aspires to abstraction, that is, seeks the creation of an ideational form beyond the strictures of experience, such a metaphysical operation is an impossibility. The creative mind is occupied by a dialectical struggle between its orientation towards an objectivity denied it and a subjective realm whose strictures are endlessly frustrating: the whole is finally subsumed in a synthesis which internalizes the absolute and we arrive at the Romantic conclusion of God in man, phrased perfectly for Hegel and Worringer in the Northern, Gothic form.

Hulme appropriates the methodology and the metaphorical structure of Worringer's system; but instead of arriving at the Romantic notion of synthesis as a model upon which to base his proposals for a new modern art, he attempts to reclaim the primacy of the life-denying religious position. His use of Henri Bergson's existential theories of the *élan vital* to repudiate scientific-materialist explanations of reality in favour of orthodox theological propositions demonstrates a parallel attempt to reconstruct a new idealism from the tenets of an anthropomorphic aesthetic. T.E. Hulme's speculative system attempts to subvert Romantic aesthetics whilst operating covertly within them, and it is this argument that forms the basis of the first part of my study (Chapters One and Two). Having once established the fallibility of Hulme's early Modernist position – which is done, in large part, with reference to the important conclusions of the overlooked aesthetician Vernon Lee – a survey of all those artists, writers and thinkers who set about trying to recover the subjectivity implicit within his philosophical position can be conducted (Chapter Three). It can then be seen that, far from operating on the margins of the Modernist tradition, artists such as John Piper intrigued with the ramifications of the parochial Gothic structure, or David Jones – haunted by the collective mythology of a Northern Celticity – recovered its essential current. T.E. Hulme had engineered his anti-Romantic, 'classical' doctrines from a procrustean reading of subjective aesthetics; a kind of poetic justice, then, was surely done when a succeeding generation applied their attentions to the deeper significances of Worringer's philosophy – and, indeed, to the Hegelian ramifications of thinkers such as Benedetto Croce – enabling them to ponder anew the question as to whether 'much Northern classicism of recent times may not after all reveal itself as merely Gothic in disguise?'.⁴

Having established a cohesion of thought amongst this later generation, my thesis returns to an important phenomenon in the history of Modernist ideas (Chapter Four); by so doing, it lays the specific ground for a detailed study of David Jones (Chapter Five), who, thrown into relief by a reclaimed territory of thought, concludes my argument as an unequivocally central figure of twentieth-century Modernism. This aforesaid phenomenon concentrates on the neo-Thomist epistemology of the philosopher Jacques Maritain (a one time student of Bergson), and provides a further and related demonstration of the early Modernist attempt to resurrect a religiously sanctioned idealism from the very philosophical tradition which had sought to circumscribe such metaphysical excursions into the realms of pure reason. A revival of interest in the teachings of St. Thomas had led Modernists such as Hulme, Eliot, Eric Gill, Christopher Dawson, the Reverend M.C. D'Arcy and other British disciples of Maritain to craft a home-spun philosophy which argued that the Kantian synthesis, and

all aesthetic systems thereafter, were nothing other than corrupted vestiges of precepts which could be found in an earlier scholastic tradition. By some process of mental inversion, they claimed, the subjective intuition had gained primacy over the conceptual intellect, anthropomorphizing metaphysics and initiating the humanist tradition whose psychological and empirical investigations were now ripe for theological rereading.

Maritain's early work thus argued the necessary objectivity of art and poetry, arguing that the subjectivist 'poison' introduced into philosophy and aesthetics by the followers of Kant and Hegel, and which attained its final flourish in the psychological studies of form conducted by theorists such as Wilhelm Worringer, should be administered a large, religious antidote. But in his later work Maritain revises his opinion. Unable to sustain the view that Modern aesthetics could be reconditioned and rescued with reference to Thomistic axioms, he concedes that, perhaps after all, creative operations depend not upon a divine light shining through intellect, but a primal preconscious emanating from intuition. The non-conceptual model of reality which he would have earlier deemed heretical increasingly concords with Maritain's Romantic literary-critical and art-historical position. His belief in the 'creative intuition' returns him to the formerly eschewed subjectivism of Bergson, whilst his historicist appraisal of artistic volition aligns him with the epochal paradigms of Hegel. His commendation of Kant's 'prime insight' into the motivations of art and poetry speaks for itself. Maritain, having performed by the middle of the century this spectacular *volte-face*, attempts to reset the critical terms of Modernism. No longer, for example, can Eliot be commended for his musings on the impersonality of the poet without stringent qualifications being made: the mythologies of an internalized collective unconscious or of individual psychology become more important than the dogmatic conclusions of the schoolmen.

For Maritain, writing in the early 1950s, the artistic sign no longer signified, or strove to signify, one orthodox abstraction subsisting in the metaphysical empyrean; instead, the sign showed forth an internal world of intuitively prehended or apperceived experience. It is with respect to this shift of emphasis that David Jones's philosophy of art is surveyed. David Jones, already manifestly influenced by the neo-Hegelian propositions of Spengler, inherits Maritain's debt to the subjective philosophies of German Romanticism: his incarnational theory of art is as preoccupied with all the contingencies of race, locality, myth and autobiography as it is with establishing a teleological relation between man as form-maker and the one formal truth that is divinity. Indeed, it is by means of the empirical criteria of subjectivity that a sense of divinity is attained, not in spite of it. David Jones's anthropomorphic aesthetic removes

him from the anti-humanism of earlier Modernists; but given that this anti-humanism depends for its religious effect upon what turns out to be an only ostensibly objective neo-Thomistic epistemology, whose actual debt to subjective aesthetics is revealed by its chief exponent and clearly demonstrated by Jones, it would appear that such anthropomorphism is not incompatible with a central current of Modernist thought. By the time that David Jones was launching into his mythological and Romantic Arthurian project in the 1940s it was the anti-humanist position which, as Maritain sought to make clear, had been marginalized.

Basing singular assertions upon the tenets of a dialectical philosophy, the protagonists of high Modernism such as Hulme or Maritain cannot avoid the generation of an immediate self-critique. In the case of Maritain the inevitable redundancy of his initial position would be owned by the thinker himself, whilst the structured inconsistencies of Hulme's posthumously promulgated thought would motivate the search for a new humanism somehow compatible with recent 'advances' in the literary and art world. Therefore, with a view to demonstrating that Early Modernism cannot be canonized in stasis and isolation, as the 'thing-in-itself' its philosophy so urgently sought to justify, that its own methodology assures its mid-century Romantic transformations, its dynamic redefinitions and its encoded continuities, I commence my study.

CHAPTER ONE

'A NOT ALWAYS STRICTLY GRAMMATICAL NEW GRAMMAR OF ASSENT': T.E. HULME AND THE THEOLOGICAL APOLOGETICS OF EARLY BRITISH MODERNISM

1.1 Introduction

The theories of British Modernism are founded upon a German dialectical tradition first given form by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* and which culminate, for our purposes, with various neo-Kantian 'psychologies of form' written in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The central antinomy inherited by British thinkers derives from Kant's original contention that, although the aesthetic judgement involves an intellectually sanctioned conception of form as objective, it suggests itself at the same time to be a subjective act involving the agency of a non-conceptual intuition. In other words, any judgement of form draws attention to epistemological polarities: on the one hand, a definition of mind which has reference to the absolute and theologically sanctioned realm of subsisting concepts, and on the other a picture of mind limited to its own organic operations and denied such a realm of pure reason. Such polarities are capable of synthesis with reference to a model of the mind in which concepts exist, but exist indeterminately, locked away in a subjectivity which can never allow them expansion into an abstract realm of pure reason.

From the antithesis described proceed two respective traditions of British Modernism. One insists upon the necessary separation of form from everything that has a bearing on subjectivity, locating its significance instead in the idealistic relations held between a conceptually based intellect and its corresponding realm of metaphysically justified, objective truths. This is the position upheld by T.E. Hulme (1883-1917) whom we may consider one of the most important and influential Modernist thinkers of the twentieth century, and whose opinions have persisted as those against which the standard critical conception of Modernism has been defined: the legacy of his thought has led us to persist in the belief that Modernist expression is synonymous with a metaphysical belief in the 'thing-in-itself' which has as its cultural equivalents an association with rigorous and hierarchical religious convictions, political extremism, eschatological visions and a generally defined elitist anti-humanism.

The other position insists that all aesthetic – and cognitive – acts are firmly grounded within the interior bounds of subjectivity. The world does not subsist as one absolute Idea, but is construed in terms of human experience: the art object reflects the sensual or psychological condition of the subject who has created it, and not some disembodied intellectual conception. Antithetical to the anti-humanist ideology of T.E. Hulme, this position is elaborated by Vernon Lee (pseudonym of Violet Paget 1856-1935), an aesthetic theorist almost entirely excluded from the critical index of British Modernist ideas. Such an exclusion might seem surprising, given that the theories promulgated by Lee were formulated according to the very same dialectical premise which provided Hulme with his aesthetic and philosophic assertions – they simply provided, so to speak, the other side of the picture.

We now arrive at the crux of this entire thesis. Whilst Vernon Lee did, in fact, remain sympathetic to the idea that her theories depended upon a dialectic whose perpetual aim was to deduce a *synthesis* of the polar positions described, T.E. Hulme demonstrated no such philosophical equanimity. His aesthetic derived its force from a single-minded resolve to propagand one position, and one position alone. He utterly disparaged the necessary dialectical counter to his own philosophy, resolving by a clever philosophical trick its subjective principles into a cry for pure form and a metaphysical conception of being. Vernon Lee displayed an awareness that objective truths might be accessed through an obscure operation of the intellect that would, none the less, always remain limited within the bounds of subjectivity (hence giving us an approximation of Kant's original synthesis); Hulme, on the other hand, embraced the idea that mind could, in fact, extend itself into a realm of pure reason and that any such subjective limitations were the vestiges of an anathematized, Romantic theory of immanence.

For the same reason that Hulme's ideas attained such original force, they also committed British Modernism to a dead-end. Sweeping away the synthetic principles instigated by Kant, they could initially provide a strong focus for a reaction against all preceding registers of Romantic or anthropomorphic expression; but having repudiated one half of the inescapable dialectic upon which their conclusions were predicated, there could be no hope of forward development. Vernon Lee, however, having maintained a relation to all the implications of the Kantian antinomy, provides for us an epistemological and historical connection with the Modernist reassemblage which took place in the 1930s and 1940s, and which developed and continued all the subjective principles which Hulme had denied.

To summarize the scope of this chapter: I wish to introduce Hulme's paradigmatic conception of Modernism tending, ideally, towards 'abstraction' – that model which has strongly coloured our own critical conceptions of the genre; I then intend to introduce Vernon Lee's definitions of a dialectical alternative to this: the reading of form according to the theory of 'empathy' or, to give the English translation its proper German derivation, *Einfühlung*. This will be followed by Vernon Lee's identification of corrupted readings of subjective philosophy and aesthetics: readings in which theological apologists, masquerading as Pragmatists, elaborate the fundamentally subjective premise of neo-Kantian aesthetics (such as empathy) into spurious justifications for the restoration of traditional, abstract, metaphysics. Lee's defence of Bergson with regard to this latter tendency will then be examined to be compared, finally, with Hulme's interpretation of Bergson – an interpretation formulated in perfect accord with the theological apologetics against which Lee had sought to protect him.

By outlining this pattern I hope to introduce the idea that Hulme's reading of Modernism is fundamentally flawed, depending as it does upon an act of philosophical atrophy. At the same time I intend to present the means by which an alternative reading can be made and, indeed, to begin to explain the ideas which underlie the historical reorientation of Modernism by those artists, theorists and poets too long committed to a critical penumbra.

1.2 T.E. Hulme and Abstraction

Hulme's general speculative aim, for purposes which suited his own ethical intentions and related aesthetic necessities, was to dismantle what he considered to be a view of the world described according to a long-prevailing and misguided humanism. This humanism was represented more than anything else by man's insistence upon notions of continuity; more specifically, Hulme saw as fallacious the continuity supposed between '(1) The inorganic world, of mathematical and physical science, (2) the organic world, dealt with by biology, psychology and history, and (3) the world of ethical and religious values'.⁵

Hulme contended that the all judgements of the modern world were distorted by an attitude which conceived of all properly external phenomena (the religious world of God and the Platonic realm of abstract form), as a continuation of human attributes, and which construed the world on the analogy of its own psychological and sensual experiences. By way of opposing such views, he eschewed the notion that all

phenomena might be determined by the empirical methodologies of a scientific tradition which had, in his opinion, reserved itself an overbearing and fallacious epistemological authority since the end of the commendably ascetic Medieval epoch; also repudiated was any notion that the modern mind, limited from making excursions into a realm of pure reason, might construct an imaginative picture of reality on the basis of its own apperceptive activities.

Thus Hulme considered 'the Renaissance attitude', the attitudes culminating in the French Revolution, 'Romanticism' and the nineteenth-century's scientific materialism all to represent the same essential disposition towards the world: that is, to have adopted a doctrine repudiating the 'sane classical dogma of original sin' (p.117), founding instead a teleology beginning and ending not in any theological consideration, but in the various states of human consciousness:

You get the hint of an idea there of something, which finally culminates in a doctrine which is the opposite of the doctrine of original sin: the belief that man as a part of nature was after all something satisfactory. The change which Copernicus is supposed to have brought about is the exact contrary of the fact. Before Copernicus, man was not the centre of the world; after Copernicus he was. You get a change from a certain profundity and intensity to that flat and insipid optimism which, passing through its first stage of decay in Rousseau, has finally culminated in that state of slush in which we have the misfortune to live. (p.80)

Hulme's attack upon these broad philosophical matters was served by a more specific thesis concerning the nature of modern art and aesthetics. His reaction against the attribution of human motive to realms which he considered necessarily distinct from all subjective agency resolved itself into a declamation, in the aesthetic sphere, of the theories of empathy which posited just this relation, and which he considered the final flourish of late nineteenth-century German Romanticism. In place of these theories he ventured the conception of abstraction, which, he contended, bespoke the utter distinction of the separate categories he had enunciated – which argued the necessary transcendence of form, its relation to realms beyond the reach of human intellectual, psychological and sensual extension or 'continuity':

(1) There are two kinds of art, geometrical and vital, absolutely distinct in kind from one another. These two arts are not modifications of one and the same art but pursue different aims and are created for the satisfaction of different necessities of the mind.

(2) Each of these arts springs from and corresponds to a certain general attitude towards the world. You get long periods of time in which only one of these arts with its corresponding mental attitudes prevails. The vital art of Greece and the Renaissance corresponded to a certain attitude of mind and the geometrical has always gone with a different general attitude, of greater intensity than this.

And (3) – this is really the point I am making for – that the re-emergence of geometrical art may be the precursor of the re-emergence of the corresponding attitude towards the world, and so, of the break up of the Renaissance humanistic attitude. The fact that this change comes first in art, before it comes in thought, is easily understandable for this reason. So thoroughly are we soaked in the spirit of the period we live in, so strong is its influence over us, that we can only escape from it in an unexpected way, as it were, a side direction like art.

I am emphasising then, the absolute character of the difference between these two arts, not only because it is important for the understanding of the new art itself, but because it enables me to maintain much wider theses. (pp.77-78)

Hulme's essay on modern art, from which this extract is taken, is an appropriation of certain ideas formulated by the German art-historian and aesthetician Wilhelm Worringer (whose philosophy will be fully scrutinized in the following chapter). Hulme posits that the will to create geometric or abstract form represents a timidity in the face of an external world which is beyond the penetration of human cognition. In the case of primitive art the tendency to abstraction is an unthinking response to a world which has yet to be understood. Concerning a more sophisticated Eastern art, for instance Byzantine art, the disposition to absolute form proceeds from a recognition that attempts to explain the world in all the subjective terms available to us are, finally, empty. In each case there is a reaction against the bewildering experiential content of the world, the aesthetic correlative of which tendency is the powerful urge to deny naturalistic representation and attempt instead the creation of a pure, spiritualized form.

Hulme receives this conception of abstraction as his aesthetic paradigm, drawing analogies between its various past iconographic manifestations and a new contemporary artistic volition in which 'there seems to be a desire for austerity and bareness, a striving towards structure and away from the messiness and confusion of nature and natural things' (p.96), through which the modern artist demonstrates a 'desire to avoid those lines and surfaces which look pleasing and organic, and to use lines which are clean, clear-cut and mechanical' (p.97). Such *a priori* abstraction celebrates the fact that the human mind is no longer able to explain the world imaginatively in terms of its subjective structure or scientifically with the sceptical tools of empiricism. No human

involvement or 'vitality' is admitted into the new typology of form whose only care is with the expression of transcendental values:

Those who are accustomed to a vital art, the basis of whose appreciation of art is what I have called empathy, and who consequently derive pleasure from the reproduction of the actual details of life, are repulsed by an art in which something which is intended to be a body, leaves out all these details and qualities they expect.

Take for example one of Mr. Wyndham Lewis's pictures [Fig. 3]. It is obvious that the artist's only interest in the human body was in a few abstract mechanical relations perceived in it, the arm as a lever and so on. The interest in living flesh as such, in all that detail that makes it vital, which is pleasing, and which we like to see reproduced, is entirely absent.

But if the division that I have insisted on in this paper – the division between the two different tendencies producing two different kinds of art – is valid, then this objection falls to the ground. What you get in Mr Lewis's pictures is what you always get inside any geometrical art. All art of this character turns the organic into something not organic, it tries to translate the changing and limited, into something unlimited and necessary....In pursuing such an aim you inevitably, of course, sacrifice the pleasure that comes from reproduction of the natural. (pp.106-107)

Here the organic, or the vital, has been resolved into geometric or abstract form. The pleasure that is associated with the reproduction of the natural and which corresponds to the notion of empathy is replaced by a volition ordered towards the alienation of subjective interest. As Ezra Pound claimed in his collection of writings on the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska:

Our thought jumps from the Renaissance to the present because it is only recently that men have begun to combat the Renaissance. I do not mean that they merely react against it; that was done in the hideous and deadening counter-reformation; but we have begun deliberately to try to free ourselves from the Renaissance shackles, as the Renaissance freed itself from the Middle Ages.⁶

This escape from the Renaissance tradition could lead him to proclaim rhetorically and in terms sympathetic to Hulme's thesis:

And the 'new form'. What is it? It is what we have said. It is an arrangement of masses in relation. It is not an empty copy of empty Roman allegories that are themselves copies of copies. It is not a mimicry of external life. It is energy cut into stone, making the stone expressive in its

fit and particular manner. It has regard to the stone. It is not something suitable for plaster or bronze, transferred to stone by machines and underlings. It regards the nature of the medium, of both the tools and the matter. These are its conventions and limits. (p.130)

Form has regard to inorganic material rather than any feeling of life that the creator might seek to express through it: the 'new form' cannot be described as a correlate to any sense of inner vitality – a definition characteristic of neo-Kantian empathy theory – but rather as an expression of the tendency to abstraction. Pound, like Hulme admired Wyndham Lewis's 'sense of the import of design not bounded by Continental achievement' (p.139), an admission which hints at the tendency in which the proponents of early British Modernism, following Hulme, adapt subjective Continental systems of thought towards their own hyper-objective ends.

1.3 Vernon Lee and Empathy

Empathy theory explains aesthetic preference by stating that the value of an object consists in the value which it holds for the contemplating subject. In short, we read the object of our contemplation according to the necessities of our own condition, and by so doing merge our activities as perceiving subject with the qualities of the perceived object: 'Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind's muscles. This is, I suppose, a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of *Einfühlung*.'⁷

Art, according to Vernon Lee, is the product of human involvement in form, of an inseparable communication – or continuity – between those categories of the organic and the non-organic which Hulme has postulated as mutually exclusive. Thus it is that in a work of 1912 Vernon Lee and her female companion C. Anstruther Thomson approvingly quote their translation of the German theorist Hermann Lotze, who claimed in his *Mikrokosmos*:

We project ourselves not merely into the forms of the tree, identifying our life with that of the slender shoots which swell and stretch forth, feeling in our soul the delight of the branches which droop and poise delicately in mid-air. We extend equally to lifeless things these feelings which lend them meaning. And by such feelings we transform the inert masses of a building into so many limbs of a living body, a body experiencing inner strains which we transport back into ourselves.⁸

Aesthetic pleasure derived from a contemplation of the inorganic has its source in a living experience. Gothic architecture, for instance, does not present itself as a purely inorganic and abstract mass of form, but is enjoyed according to the experience which it re-awakens in the subject; in this particular case it becomes for him an extension of the living Northern forest with which he is familiar. As Vernon Lee notes, we say in our descriptions of this same architectural form that

arches spring, cupolas soar, belfries point, although the material buildings merely obey the laws of gravitation. Nay, we attribute movement to motionless lines and surfaces; they *move, spread out, flow, bend, twist*, etc. They do...what we should feel ourselves doing if we were inside them. For we *are* inside them; we have 'felt ourselves,' projected our own experience, into them, or more correctly into the pattern which they constitute. (p.19)

Therefore, 'to the objective and passive formula "this form is beautiful" will be added the subjective and active formula "*I like* (that is to say, *I try to keep in relation with*) this form"' (p.54). The aesthetic act involves an inner or familiar condition playing itself out in a form which it claims as its own:

Our pleasure or displeasure in the subjective state which we recognise or imagine, is due to this subjective state *having been ours*, and becoming ours again when we thus attribute it. In other words, every subjective phenomenon, emotion, feeling, state of well-being or the reverse, etc., can only be known directly and in so far as given by our inner experience; consequently, what we take for the perception of its existence outside us is only the consciousness of its strong or weak reviviscence in ourselves. Let me repeat and re-repeat it: Empathy, or *Einfühlung*, that is to say, the attribution of our modes to a *non-ego*, is *accompanied by satisfaction or dissatisfaction because it takes place in ourselves*. (p.48)

Based upon the theories postulated by Kant in his third *Critique*, empathy consists of a harmony felt between the purely subjective (non-conceptual) faculties of the mind and the structure of the perceived or intuitively felt world. Vernon Lee translates from Theodor Lipps's essay *Aesthetische Einfühlung* where such an idea is more obviously echoed in the statement that 'the law of association through similarity is also a law of the extension of every characteristic kind of psychical excitement or movement, a law of irradiation owing to similarity...a law of the co-resonance of similar or similarly tuned "chords" of our inner nature, a law of the psychical resonance of the similar' (p.38). The object from whose beauty we derive pleasure is gauged in a non-objective

and non-conceptual manner: it cannot be attributed the status of an independent existent or 'thing-in-itself' whose beauty is implicit. Lee provides another translation of Lipps:

Aesthetic pleasure is dependent upon the attribution of Life, of soul (Belebung, Beseelung). Aesthetic contemplation, out of which aesthetic pleasure arises, always contains such Belebung or Beseelung. But it is impossible for me to see or hear life, living outside myself, or otherwise perceive it with my senses. I can find it only in myself as a peculiarity of my personality. In aesthetic contemplation I therefore lend to the aesthetic object my own personality in a particular manner, or at all events a mode of my personality's existence. The Object, to which I aesthetically lend life or soul, carries in itself a reflection of my personality. (p.39)

It is impossible for the subject to see or hear life or living outside of himself. Consequently the object from which the observer derives aesthetic pleasure presents itself as a continuation of the subjective personality: that object exists only for the contemplating subject and can claim no *a priori* transcendental validation. Hume, indeed, had said something to the effect that 'beauty is no quality in things themselves; it exists merely in the mind which contemplates them'. In his *Raumaesthetik*, Lipps, again by courtesy of Lee's translation, continues his description of this subjectively constructed world with reference to another architectural metaphor, the Doric column:

The shape of the column...does not merely *exist*, but *becomes*, and that not once for all but over again at every moment. In other words, we are making (*i.e.* the shape of) the column into the subject of a mechanical (*i.e.* dynamical) interpretation. We do so not intentionally, or as the result of reflection; on the contrary, the mechanical interpretation is given directly with the perception. Now the processes of such mechanical *becoming* do not occur merely in the world *outside* us. There is a category of mechanical *becoming* (or *happening* – *geschelen*) which is in every sense of the word more closely connected with ourselves: namely, the *becoming* in us....We therefore consider the *becoming outside* of us according to the analogy of the *becoming in* us, that is to say, according to the analogy of our personal experience. (p.43)

Thus it is that Lee herself can claim that 'we beat back the inroads of the outer world by establishing the headquarters of our own inner conditions in it or in what seems to be it; we are not able to keep up any synthesis of inner consciousness without thus allaying it to the thought, if not the reality, of something outside us'.⁹ Lee, like Lipps, is certain only of the human consciousness existing in an immediate and non-reflective capacity: all supposedly objective existents must be measured anthropomorphically. If an

external world subsists then it can only be gauged through our own subjective faculties, and this amounts to the same as saying that the external world is and can only ever be a projection and elaboration of our own inner world, the 'analogy of our personal experience'.

If it is the case that 'all the real truth in the *Einfühlung* hypothesis is connected with the subjective existence of the work of art, that is to say, with the idea of it which we make for ourselves; an idea made up in part of our experiences of life and activity',¹⁰ then a conclusive distinction must be drawn between art and religion:

The difference is that in the case of Art we do not attribute independent objective existence to our own states; we know that we, or others like us, have arranged the thing; we know that we are contemplating to please ourselves, and that the contemplated object has been made for such contemplation. In the case of Religion we muddle this fact up with the quite different fact of the existence of an independent Universe, the Universe which sensations testify to, and we persuade ourselves that we are serving someone else when we are only serving ourselves. Hence the greater sincerity of Art.¹¹

Art claims its sincerity as a purely subjective extension of human volition, whereas religion lacks sincerity because the basis of such belief depends upon the postulation of an external realm of being beyond the capacity of human understanding:

To say that there is no teleology in the outer universe may be a rash statement, but rash or not rash, it does not imply that there is no teleology in the human consciousness; indeed here again, as in the case of determinism, the only teleology of which we can be quite sure is precisely in the human consciousness, and more particularly in yours or mine. Any other is at best, an inference, correct or incorrect, but most often it is a mere metaphorical mode of speech, a case of what psychological aesthetics call *Empathy*, or projection of human modes of being into outer forms or objects. (p.196)

Vernon Lee returns us to Kant's theories of the limitations of pure reason, arguing that if objective truths exist, then they exist intuitively and are projected as an extension of organic volitions from which they are inextricable and which cannot be determined conceptually:

If, as all philosophical progress unites in thinking, and as Kant has made it so easy for us all to grasp, if it is true that all that we know we can know only in the terms of our senses and our organic intellectual necessities, then must the Objective First Cause remain for ever hopelessly

hidden from our knowledge and our imagination; and the God, whatsoever he be, whom we worship, we hope for or deny, be but an idol of our own making, an idol the more potent that he is a part of ourselves; but an idol in judging of whose qualities and whose possibilities we are only judging our own thoughts, and desires, and dreams.¹²

Empathy theory insists upon the primary necessity of humanism in art. Art may be abstract in the sense that it does not commit itself to a naive mimicry of external nature, but its inner motivation is that which proceeds from the profound volitions of human psychology. Therefore, although it is the case that 'the perspective, the composition, of great pictures is at variance with that of real landscape; and in pattern as such, animal and vegetable shapes have been made congruous, symmetrical, rhythmical, so as to suit an aesthetic imperative recognisable equally in the basket-work of savages and the carvings of Gothic stonemasons',¹³ the aesthetic imperative of which Lee speaks is not the abstract imperative of a purely conceptual volition, but a human imperative: that of the savage or the Gothic mason. In this sense she can claim that 'from the aesthetic standpoint all aesthetic form is equally abstract, because the aesthetic standpoint is that of a play of abstract forces' (p.362, n), whilst maintaining (in neat contradistinction to Hulme) that 'I do not believe that any artistic form, except in periods of utter perfunctoriness like our own, was ever really geometrical, however much it resembled one of the *schemata* of geometry' (p.362, n). Even if an art-form is non-representational, because it consists of an extension of human feelings its message is democratic.¹⁴

no form can be either fully perfected by the craftsman or appreciated by the public unless it be familiar; that is to say, unless its complete *Empathy* or *Einfühlung* be secured by repetition in every variety of application, as we find it the case with the forms of Egyptian, Hellenic, or Mediaeval art, which exist equally in the most exalted and the most humble applications. And similarly the separation of a class of 'artists' (with its corresponding class of 'art-lovers') from ordinary craftsmen and average mankind has always brought about aesthetic uncertainty, since this independent class has invariably tended to what is called 'art for art's sake,' that is to say, art in which technical skill, scientific knowledge, desire for novelty or self-expression have broken with the traditions resulting from the unconscious sway of spontaneous aesthetic preference. (p.32)

A separation of the artist from 'ordinary craftsmen and average mankind' is the position to which anyone supportive of an objectivist aesthetic is forced. If claims are made for an art whose production depends upon a special type of vision which is accessed

through a release of the artist from the normal, practical necessities of life, then it follows that the meaningfulness of such an art will be denied to the majority: if art is a privileged quality removed from the exigencies of experience then its powers of communication are considerably reduced. This is the position which Hulme advocates when proposing a new order of religious art – it should be life-alien and circumspectly impersonal, perfunctorily geometrical.

Conversely, Vernon Lee's aesthetic proposed artistic form as a mediatrix of common experience, the particular embodiment of a general cultural situation:

Applying the conceptions of recent aestheticians, we understand that the art of any time or country was the common property of all the men thereof, simply because the craftsmen had the habit not merely of those general relations of proportion and dimension whose *Empathy* (*Einfühlung*) is agreeable to the normal human being, but also of those more special forms into which the men of different places and periods have been wont to project, by aesthetic sympathy, the modes of acting and willing most favourable to their well-being. (pp.33-34)

There is in Lee's aesthetic neither the concept of Romantic genius anathema to Hulme for its confusion of human and divine values nor, indeed, Hulme's inscrutable teleological explanations of artistic form. Instead, 'the individual artist, however great, merely selects among the forms habitual in his youth and alters them, even as the mechanical inventor or the philosopher alters and develops the appliances or the systems of his predecessors' (p.32). It is therefore the case that 'the greatest innovator does not create out of nothing, but transmutes already existing forms into something possessing the familiarity of the old and the fascination of the new' (p.33). Lee concludes that 'the aesthetic form which gives us joy is giving us the finest vital rhythms and patterns of a great, rich and harmonious individual, and the scheme, so to speak, of what has proved most beneficial and enduring in the vital modes of the race' (p.364).

1.4 The 'Two Pragmatisms' and the 'Central Problem of Aesthetics'

Two differing interpretations of one dialectical premise have been explored: T.E. Hulme's definition of abstraction, which posits the conception that art exists as a 'thing-in-itself', and Vernon Lee's empathic notion that the art object comes into being as a merging of subjectivity with the thing contemplated. We now need to address the

issue of how Hulme constructs his philosophy with reference to the very same principles which afford Lee her neo-Kantian conceptions of form, whilst concluding from them an entirely opposing thesis. The answer may be partially given by looking at what Vernon Lee herself identifies as a philosophical problem central to modern thought and aesthetics at the turn of the twentieth century.

Science is for ever invalidating some part of its statements, because it is for ever perfecting their whole; and reason, as it develops, takes its own self as subject for its criticism, asking, with Berkeley, Hume and Kant, and now with the Pragmatism of Peirce: What can we know? or rather, How do we know? Encouraged by, and taking advantage of this, the minds reluctantly shaken in their religious habits, are laying about them for excuses to disbelieve whatever has made them unbelievers. They allege reason's criticism of its own nature and methods to discredit reason's conclusions. They argue that if religion is made by man it must be worth re-making. Philological exegesis, anthropological study of myths and institutions, psychology and metaphysical analysis, and all the sciences which have undermined what used to be called *religious truths*, are now invoked to re-instate some portion of them in the garb of desirable and valuable errors...Moreover, these thinkers have attached themselves, without exception, to the philosophical school which makes *Life* the central and ultimate and paramount mystery.¹⁵

Vernon Lee identifies a tendency in modern thought which, noting Kant's critique of pure reason and other attacks upon metaphysical theories of knowledge, draws attention to what it deems the ambiguous epistemological basis upon which such deductions are made. Given that reason admits its own limitations – 'takes', as the argument runs, 'its own self as subject for its criticism' – how can it be so certain in its denial of what may or may not lie beyond it? Reason might be constrained by experience – but should this necessarily rule out the usefulness of speculating the existence of metaphysical truths beyond reason's circumscribed capabilities? Such a question is especially valid as, having drawn attention to the limitations of reason regarding the possibility of attaining an *a priori* correspondence with objects of ideal knowledge, philosophy's ability to grasp the essentials of experience itself also increasingly features as a subject of its own enquiry. Finding himself in this impossible and apparently self-defeating situation, state Vernon Lee's theological apologists, the modern thinker might just as well restore his faith in the absolute he had so presumptuously denied.

On this broad basis Lee identifies two Pragmatisms: firstly, one which sought to determine or disprove the truth-value of various intellectual or metaphysical conceptions

by referring back to the scientific data of practical consequence; secondly, another which began, with a covert and ironic reference to the empirical methodologies of its original proponents, to assert the indescribable nature of life and experience itself, therefore leading it to seek out the spiritual absolutes it had initially questioned. The original philosophy formulated by Charles Peirce, in which the truth of any proposition was gauged according to 'its cash-value in terms of particular experience' (p.13), was substituted for a system whose chief feature was the conflation of truth with moral and or ethical values:

The Pragmatists have refused to proclaim the *value of what is possibly not true*, and they have applied themselves to identifying *that which possesses value* with *truth* itself. This they have done by laying hold of a philosophical principle to which its earliest formulator, Mr Charles Sanders Peirce, had given the name of 'Pragmatism'; and by converting this principle, by endless moves revoked whenever detected, into the very thing which that proto-Pragmatist had invented Pragmatism to expose, disprove, confute and reduce for ever to silence. (p.12)

Lee's main attack is levelled against the Pragmatism of F.C. Schiller and William James whom she terms 'a great Goliath of science who comes forward with newly furbished weapons from the old orthodox armoury'.¹⁶ The strictly empirical and sceptical Pragmatism developed by C.S. Peirce for 'making our ideas clear' was supplanted by Schiller and James's religious 'Will-to-Believe': any anthropocentric Pragmatism that these latter two professed was contradicted by their belief in the Pascalian wager expounded by James and cited by Lee: 'On pragmatic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true.'¹⁷ Therefore, Lee opines, 'the Pragmatism of Messrs W. James and Schiller is, so far as it possesses any originality, a method of apologetics, a not always strictly grammatical new *Grammar of Assent*' (p.47). What truths they offer are 'not merely of *Philosophy*, but of *Theism*' (p.47). Moreover, according to Lee – and herein lies the real danger of this philosophical affliction – the manipulative nature of this engineered inflection is not noticed as such, but is considered the fruition of an indigenous intellectual tendency:

Professor James produces on the reader's mind the impression that the doctrine of Right-to-Believe, or Will-to-Believe, which he has foisted upon Mr Peirce's Pragmatism, is not only identical with it, but has been acted upon, long before it was ever given a name or formula, by the very philosophers who notoriously did most against those practically useful theological and mystical assumptions which they denounced as preferred, desired, 'chosen,' in fact, as 'willed' beliefs. The

lay public, the public hungry for 'religious experiences' like those to whose advantages Professor James has devoted so many pages, are therefore comfortably able to say: 'You know the *Will-to-Believe* was the philosophic method not only of that great Mr Peirce who invented Pragmatism, but also of Locke, Berkeley, Hume, the Mills, Professor Bain and all the people who we thought were sceptics and rationalists, it is the *characteristically British Philosophy*.' (p.39)

Now, a connection can be made between Vernon Lee's identification of this general philosophical tendency and the dangers which she considers to be resident in empathy theory. Vernon Lee considers empathy as a fundamentally Pragmatic model by which to explain aesthetic preference – such preference depends upon the empirical relations between subject and object. Beauty in an object may be explained by referring back to the psychological or sensual experience which is ours and which constitutes that beauty. But in the same way that a Will-to-Believe Pragmatist such as James or Schiller might call into question the epistemological validity of an empirical explanation of the subject-world relation, so an aesthete might re-introduce into empathy theory a similar aporia concerning the subject-object relation – and empathy might be encouraged to extend once more into a theory of abstraction. In anticipation of later remarks, we may say that this argument is the exact one deployed by T.E. Hulme.

Why, since I now consider formal-dynamic empathy as due, not to actually present movements and muscular-organic sensations, but to the extremely abstract ideas of movement and its modes residual from countless individual and possibly racial experiences, why should I still give importance to present movement *sensations*, and connected organic sensations also present, which I am scarcely ever aware of in my own case, and which are not necessary to explain the purely 'mental' phenomenon of interpretation of visible form in terms of movement and energy that I constantly find taking place as an essential part of my own formal aesthetic perception?¹⁸

Why is it that Vernon Lee wishes to ground her theories in the bedrock of purely sensual experience although she herself professes a subscription to aesthetic preference in terms of the more arcane categories of 'purely mental phenomenon'? The reason that may be given is this: Lee wishes to dissociate herself from any obscurantism which posits the inexplicability of human cognitive operations. By submitting to the thesis that aesthetic preference involves an arcane operation of the mind which is beyond straightforward, demonstrable analysis, the aesthete begins to encourage metaphysical speculation of the kind advertised by the Will-to-Believe Pragmatist. Although Lee clearly concurs with the Kantian notion of a harmony generated between

the 'purely mental' structure of the mind and the external world, she wants to be sure that its basis in subjectivity is never doubted. Therefore she underpins such descriptions with constant reference to the organic provenance of all purely mental activity: 'we must take into consideration such mimetic-organic sensations because they may possibly afford us a clue to the origin of the odd fact of our associating movement and energy with objects and patterns, with mere *shapes*, of which we know that they *cannot move*' (p.354).

Vernon Lee notes in Theodor Lipps's later work an inclination to define empathy as the total participation of ego in external phenomena, rather than, as she considers to be correct, a process in which particular aspects of ourselves find an analogue in the external world without foregoing their relation to the empirical conditions comprising subjectivity. Indeed, misguided applications of the term empathy, Lee claims, are often attributable to the misinterpretation of 'the German verb "*sich einfühlen*" (to feel *oneself* into)'¹⁹ which 'defines, or rather does not define, Empathy as a metaphysical and quasi-mythological *projection of the ego* into the object or shape under observation' (pp.66-67). Theodor Lipps states that 'in empathy, therefore, I am not the real I, but am inwardly liberated from the latter, i.e. I am liberated from everything which I am apart from contemplation of the form. I am only this ideal, this contemplating I'.²⁰ Vernon Lee attempts to keep her definitions of empathy within the confines of a basic empiricism, to avoid surrendering her pragmatic approach to the abstractions of metaphysical speculation after the manner of Lipps. She is unwilling to accept a view of empathy in which subjectivity becomes idealized. Indeed, such a conception represents the very antithesis of all definitions hitherto secured by Lee, for whom empathy, rather than transcending subjective potentialities, 'is enmeshed with the phenomena of memory, attention, and the connection between thought and motor reactions, even if it is not entirely dependent upon them'.²¹ Empathy is concerned with a celebration of all the variable associations of human motivation and should in no way be considered a resolution of subjectivity into extra-temporal, extra-spatial abstractions.

If it is the case that there must exist purely mental phenomena, such categories of knowledge cannot extend beyond the circumscriptions of the human mind which has an inescapably organic basis and unarguably subjective teleology. Empathy, according to Vernon Lee, can provide no means by which an intellectual escape from corporeality is effected. The mind cannot construct an ideal conceptual realm beyond itself within which to lose itself: it is constituted of psychological 'motor ideas' which are not ideational escapes from nature but, conversely, abbreviated projections of it:

For, after all, in attempting to explain variations in aesthetic consciousness by alterations in bodily processes, we must surely suppose that what exists in consciousness is not the knowledge (*knowledge* which is itself a psychological fact!) of bodily processes in themselves, but some sort of translation or transmutation thereof into – well, into those mysterious things which we can only, for the moment, call *modes of consciousness*, and among which exist those very terms, ‘knowledge,’ ‘localisation,’ ‘sensation,’ etc. etc., which alone tell us of our bodily existence; for we are in a vicious circle: we can know our bodily states only in, or through, or by, what we call our mental ones. (p.138)

Underlying the motor idea there must always be the premise of the actually known. Thus it is that Lee refers to modern psychology and philosophy not in terms of absolutist assertions but in terms of the mind’s practical relation to experience. She searches the empirical significances of Bergsonism and Lippsian aesthetics whilst constantly remaining wary of their theological potentialities:

Modern psychology (and even modern philosophy, thanks to Bergson) has prepared us to understand that aesthetic *Einfühlung* would not be a sudden phenomenon starting *ex nihilo*, but a mere regrouping of senses of movement which are for ever present in our consciousness, indeed which seem to form its woof. ‘Feelings’ (as distinguished from ‘sensations’) of dynamic conditions and attractions are among the *immediate*, the primary data of our psychic life. (p.83)

Lee stresses that empathy is predicated upon an ‘immediate’ state of consciousness; that it does not involve any act of creation which cannot be explained with reference to ideas – we might say memories – of actual experience, albeit those ideas and memories may be unlocalized and unspecific to an immediate physical condition:

We have been shown the superposition and interchange of various mental processes, and their combinations and vicarious relationships – the tactile-locomotor images replaced, *symbolised*, by the visual ones; the visual images *short-handed*, their values extracted, by the verbal ones. And we should therefore be prepared to find very little likeness between the facts of consciousness and the bodily changes which underlie them, or the symbolical representatives of bodily movements which may have accompanied or perhaps do still accompany, unnoticed, all visual perception, and which account for that otherwise unaccountable stimulation of abstract motor memory by the sight of motionless shapes. And it seems to me possible that the secondary production of kinaesthetic processes by the already existing phenomenon of formal-dynamic empathy may be connected, in

the persons who are subject to it, with a survival of such underlying kinaesthetic consciousness superseded in other subjects by a more completely abstract and, so to speak, disembodied kind of dynamic empathy. (p.357)

Vernon Lee is not able to accept that any aesthetic response derived from a contemplation of purely abstract pattern is attributable to obscurantist metaphysics or any type of theological explanation. Rather is there a connection, obscured though it might be, between the symbolic and the sensual: psychological interpretation of form is the 'short-handed' translation of a response which is always based upon conditions of actual experience. We sense movement in the static abstract pattern because the contemplation of that pattern is, at some stage, predicated on our own experience of movement:

must there not be in us some *present* movement however slight, to set going this (to use old-fashioned language) chain of associations of movement, indeed to defend such abstract motor imagination from the competition of the less abstract, richer, newer chains of more or less individual associations which cause us to recognise those shapes as 'representing' objects of our concrete experience? *For let it be remembered that formal-dynamic empathy is entirely independent of all suggestion of what a shape 'represents,' indeed it is inhibited oftener than excited, by the thought of a represented object.* Granted therefore that formal-aesthetic empathy is of the nature of memory, of thought, why should we remember, think of, movement and its modes unless some movement actually going on suggests those abstract ideas of movement? That this actually existing and suggestive movement is largely that of the eyes and of all the bodily parts instrumental in adjusting our sight or affected by such bodily adjustments, I feel more and more inclined to think. (pp.354-355)

If it is the case that formal-dynamic empathy is concerned with non-representational objects or patterns, Vernon Lee can only accept that the aesthetic response secured from such an abstract configuration must in some way be related to some obscure physiological process; that the motor ideas and related mental associations it inspires must in some way be given an original momentum by an act of movement. Indeed, the modern psychological trends with which she sympathizes, 'tend to the recognition that the phenomena of consciousness are not the parallels of physiological processes, but rather their signs or vestiges in every degree of complication and every degree of impoverishment' (p.357).

1.5 Vernon Lee and Bergson

Given that Vernon Lee attempted to maintain for empathy theory a basis in subjectivity and to save it from the realms of metaphysical speculation, it is interesting to note her comments on Bergson and, moreover, to compare her conclusions with those made by Hulme. For whilst Lee attempts to define Bergson's theories in accordance with the subjective axioms of empathy, T.E. Hulme extends the latter's philosophy towards that secondary Pragmatism disavowed by Lee – a continuation of his effort to furnish a definition of art as essentially abstract.

The obscurantism of our day frequently tries to identify this residual, and so far irreclaimable, mass of mystic thought with the subconscious or automatic activities constituting life's very core; while our impatient, indiscriminating disdain for the insufficiency of former rationalistic explanation of the world delivers us into the hands of these apologists for dying creeds. Moreover, the vitalistic conceptions of much recent biology lend themselves, occasionally perhaps even in the minds of their authors, to a vague animism. On the other hand, our gradual recognition of the part played in history by myths and misapprehensions, our recognition also how little has been achieved by lucid programme and how much by mere blind struggle of passions and habits, has further contributed, in a negative sense at least, to an attempted restoration of the old principles of faith and mystery; while the increasing importance given by mental science to the notion of unconscious reflexes and of psychic processes outside of the focus of attention, has also been called upon for the humiliation of the former despot Reason and the reinstatement of whatever mental Chaos preceded it.²²

Vernon Lee continues her critique of the 'Pragmatic' tradition whose arraignment has been her claimed task: the 'subconscious or automatic devices' spoken of here are directed at theorists such as Bergson who, having lost faith in rational explanations of the world, seek to find reality in mental territories which cannot be approached by our formerly 'insufficient' cognitive procedures. As we are no longer able to provide a clear *a priori* explanation of the world, our mind seeks to justify itself in terms of archaic and non-rational creeds such as the cult of animism. Furthermore, as the sensed failure of a 'lucid programme' of scientific discourse becomes more pressing, so the obscurantist principles of 'faith and mystery', including finally the traditional orthodox proposition, become increasingly engaging.

Such is the precarious position to which a philosopher such as Bergson brings us. Vernon Lee, however, whilst accepting a certain gnosticism, works from the assumption that 'man is certainly not the centre of all things, but I do not see what else is to be his centre save himself'.²³ Given that this is the case, there can be no attempt to construct religious absolutes from what must always remain, finally, subjective states of consciousness. If man is unable to comprehend all the significances of his mental life, then the only thing of which he may be sure are precisely those uncertainties. Hence Lee begins her reclamation of Bergson, citing his theory of the 'données immédiates de la conscience':

Indeed, these direct data, this *knowledge from within*, this knowledge from what Professor James alludes to as 'subconscious regions,' consists mainly in modes of our activity; these inner data are *how's* rather than *what's*, they are facts of succession, co-existence, repetition, tension, slackness, effort, relief, direction; above all, facts of grasping forwards, shrinking backwards, seeking, avoiding – in short, of preference and repulsion. This is what I would call, rather than the *subconscious*, the purely subjective, the absolutely *inner* self; it constitutes, I think, the very essence of the chaotic dark consciousness of our life. (p.166)

Any suggestion of ineffable divinity camouflaged under the form of an inexplicable 'subconscious' is curtailed by Lee; instead she supposes that any such 'inner data' have an external correlate which may be easily demonstrated with reference to the empirical or 'conscious' conditions of human existence. Therefore she is able to draw a connection between Bergson's thought and the thought of the German exponents of empathy theory:

There is every reason why there should be a permanent exchange or change of place between our inner and our outer data, why the modes of the inner life (modes of motion, energy, sequence, volition, connection, etc.), should be attributed by what the Germans call *Einfühlung* to the data of the senses, why all inner data which are not needed to regulate our adjustments (pleasure-pain data particularly) should be projected onto the periphery. But from this give-and-take there arises also that our inner states, and in proportion as they are difficult to localize, tend to explain themselves by such reference to the outside, to the non-ego; in other words, we get the habit of giving our inner states the support, the explanation, of outer facts, of finding objective reasons for our own elations and depressions, our inner cravings and shrinkings. (p.168)

According to Lee, Bergson's conception of artistic intuition parallels empathy theory, a reasonable position to adopt considering that he had claimed in his 1907 work *Creative Evolution* that

our eye perceives the features of the living being, merely as assembled, not as mutually organized. The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it. This intention is just what the artist tries to regain, in placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model.²⁴

1.6 Pragmatism, Hulme and Bergson

Hulme, in direct contrast to Vernon Lee, does not pinion Bergson's theories to anthropomorphic notions such as empathy. Instead, the conclusions of the latter are searched for their metaphysical implications. With respect to this, Bergson, displaying signs of the Will-to-Believe Pragmatism identified by Lee, is included in Richard Rorty's list of theological apologists masquerading as Pragmatists:

I myself would join Reichenbach in dismissing classical Husserlian phenomenology, Bergson, Whitehead, the Dewey of *Experience and Nature*, the James of *Radical Empiricism*, neo-Thomist epistemological realism, and a variety of other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century systems. Bergson and Whitehead, and the bad ('metaphysical') parts of Dewey and James, seem to me merely weakened versions of idealism – attempts to answer 'unscientifically' formulated epistemological questions about the 'relation of subject and object' by 'naive generalizations and analogies' which emphasize 'feeling' rather than 'cognition.' Phenomenology and neo-Thomism also seem diagnosable and dismissable along Reichenbachian lines. Both movements tried in vain to isolate a *Fach* for themselves, distinct from science and its self-clarification, by giving sense to the notion of distinctively 'philosophical,' super-scientific knowledge.²⁵

For the same reasons that Reichenbach, Rorty and Vernon Lee reject this style of Pragmatism, alien from the 'self-clarification' of science and unsuited for 'making our ideas clear', T.E. Hulme lends it his support. Therefore he condones the philosophy and ethics of Moore and Husserl as 'a kind of scholasticism',²⁶ appreciating the fact that they establish, in reaction to 'the subjectivism and relativism of humanist ethics' (p.62), an 'objective character of ethical values' (p.62).

Hulme claims, however, that such a tradition represents only a 'partial' reaction to humanism, failing to establish 'an order or *hierarchy* among such values' (pp.62-63). Moore, Husserl and Bergson launch their 'weakened versions of idealism' from within the parameters of a world-view which they fail to divide up into absolutely separate categories. So it is that William James, cited by Lee, states that 'between the two extremes, of crude naturalism on the one hand and transcendental absolutism on the other, you may find that what I take the liberty of calling the pragmatistic or melioristic type of theism, is exactly *what you require*'.²⁷ Hulme, turning his back upon such meliorism, makes his hierarchy and draws his divisions. As he attacks humanism outright from a discontinuous position of 'transcendental absolutism' he can nod gratefully at the likes of James, Husserl and Moore, paying tribute to the fact that 'they have created the machinery of an anti-humanist reaction which will proceed much further than they ever intended'.²⁸

In the same way, Bergson's philosophy did much to provide Hulme with the inertia he needed to carry through his reactionary principles. Bergson suggested the inscrutable nature of experience: it was beyond the grasp of our theoretical determinations and could be seized by the intuition alone. The apprehension of experience was therefore indescribable, it could only be *felt* to have happened. As such, Bergson's thesis lends support to Hulme's contention that a long prevailing tradition of humanist epistemology had spent itself. Man was denied the interpretive sureties afforded him since the Renaissance: our knowledge of the world was irreducible to analytical determination and could no longer be captured by the scientifically mensurated structures of time or space. Life, remembering Vernon Lee's descriptions of Will-to-Believe Pragmatism, was rendered 'the central and ultimate and paramount mystery'.

Bergson provided Hulme with a methodological structure whose necessary self-questioning begged the restoration of some formal absolute. His Heraclitean philosophy sought to demonstrate the impossibility of making any sort of clear statement about the world: it existed, but only for the lucky few in touch with an illogical deeper self which could provide neither proofs nor definitions of its reality. His theories extracted an irrational '*élan-vital*' from the matrices of explanation constructed around it by what he considered to be generations of misguided humanists. Thus his philosophy, freeing the obscure motivations of life from the mechanical determinations of science and logic, served, in part, Hulme's desire to separate the three regions of 'reality' previously described:

So far so good. But the same movement that recognises the existence of the first absolute chasm (between the physical and the vital), proceeds to ignore the second, that between biology and the ethical, religious values. Having made this immense step away from materialism, it believes itself adequately equipped for a statement of all the *ideal* values. It does not distinguish different levels of the non-material. All that is non-material, must it think be *vital*. The momentum of its escape from mechanism carries it on to the attempt to restate the whole of religion in terms of vitalism. This is ridiculous. Biology is not theology, nor can God be defined in terms of 'life' or 'progress.' Modernism entirely misunderstands the nature of religion. But the last twenty years have produced masses of writing on this basis, and in as far as thought to-day is not materialistic, it tends to be exclusively of this kind. (pp.7-8)

Bergson, according to Hulme, does well to draw a necessary distinction between the material world proper to science and the organic world. This proves that life is not easily comprehensible and cannot be managed by our outmoded means of interpretation. But Bergson's repudiation of scientific materialism is not replaced with the 'transcendental absolutism' that Hulme would require. Bergson questions the satisfactoriness of explaining the objects of the world according to mechanistic theories, but neither can he rest content with the conclusions of traditional metaphysics. As a result, the inscrutable life-force, no longer discovering its explanation in the finite certitudes of our strictly empirical enquiries nor, however, in the infinite certainty of subsisting divinity, locates itself in the organic world and drives it as an unthinking force. The world of objects is no longer the preserve of the scientific mind nor of the purely rational mind but is discovered intuitively. Hulme, therefore, notes Bergson's failure to repudiate the humanist philosophy of continuity, claiming it to be the case that 'it is easy to understand why the absolute division between the inorganic and the organic is so much more easily recognised than the second division. For the first falls easily into line with humanism, while the second breaks the whole Renaissance tradition' (p.8).

'If religion is made by man it must be worth re-making.' Bergson, qualifying for Vernon Lee's descriptions of a new Pragmatism, re-makes religion according to precepts which deny logical explanation. Hulme could commend Bergson's 'Modernist' identification of an inscrutable flux challenging the anthropocentric confidence of the world-ordering intellect whilst himself reinstating, under cover of that confusion, the proper force that passes all understanding: the divine principle. In Hulme's opinion Bergson had not gone far enough in an attempt to reconcile the mind,

freed from its empirical, materialistic and scientific inclinations, with the realm of *pure* reason from which it had been exiled. The subjectivism still implicit in Bergson's equations was therefore unacceptable, and a new British Modernism was to carry this reaction against humanism much further still:

The method I wish to pursue then is this. In dealing with these confused phenomena, to hold the real nature of the *absolute discontinuity* between vital and religious things constantly before the mind; and thus to clearly separate those things, which are in reality separate. I believe this to be a very fertile method, and that it is possible by using it, not only to destroy all these bastard phenomena, but also to recover the real significance of many things which it seems absolutely impossible for the 'modern' mind to understand. (p.11)

The prevalent critical conception of British Modernism has derived its focus from Hulme's doctrine of discontinuity. His contention that the world does not exist as the analogy of subjective experience, but begins and ends with a theological principle within whose parentheses men are conceived only as original sinners, has ramifications which may be located far and wide. But Hulme's conception is philosophically flawed. Basing itself upon the essentially synthetic propositions of a neo-Kantian tradition, a duplicitous assertion is made to the effect that modern thought 'entirely misunderstands the nature of religion'. Thus Hulme aims for the best of both worlds: whilst Bergson's attack upon scientific explanations of the world was acceptable to him, his relocation of metaphysics within an experiential or organic compass, no matter how flux-like and unknowable that might be, was to be rejected.

Hulme follows theorists such as Bergson as far as they are able to provide him with a methodological apparatus allowing him to posit the inexplicable nature of cognition; but at that juncture he does not rest content with the only partially satisfactory doctrine of 'intuition', pronouncing instead man's abstract, conceptual relations to a traditional, external absolute. His final position, then, is the repudiation of any Romantic theory of immanence which 'confuses both human and divine things, by not clearly separating them...by introducing in them the *Perfection* that properly belongs to the non-human' (pp.10-11). In order to make such a statement and to fracture the humanist continuum, Hulme must commit himself to a deliberately procrustean reading of the dialectic upon which he depends. In the proceeding chapter it shall be seen how Hulme continues this dialectical 'arrest' and forges his apologist Pragmatics through a particularized reading of Wilhelm Worringer's exposition of empathy theory. Again, a reading against which Vernon Lee had tried to brace early modern British aesthetics.

CHAPTER TWO

WORRINGER, HEGEL AND HISTORICITY: THE DIALECTICAL PROVENANCE OF MODERNIST IDEOLOGY DISCOVERED

2.1 Introduction

Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965) had an influence upon the early history of British Modernism which was implicit rather than explicit. It was not until 1927 that a translation of his most significant work, *Form In Gothic* was made available to a British audience. His doctoral dissertation, *Abstraction and Empathy*, in which he lays the foundations of the theories to be elaborated in this later work, was not published in Britain until 1953. The most influential rendering of Worringer available until 1927 was that which was provided by T.E. Hulme, who met Worringer in Berlin in 1913 and disseminated his ideas amongst British writers and artists, giving them form in the posthumously published *Speculations*.

Hulme's interpretation of Worringer, however, is not a straightforward one. As with his readings of Bergson, he attempts to elaborate Worringer's partial reaction to humanist philosophy and aesthetics into his own theoretical justifications for an absolutist formalism in the arts. It was not until 1927 that British artists and writers, having access to Herbert Read's translation of *Form and Gothic*, were able to retrieve the full dialectical implications of Worringer's work: to reclaim for themselves the Romantic implications of empathy theory underpinning all his conclusions, and so to dismiss Hulme's partisan transcriptions which, ignoring all the subjective tenets of Worringer's system, insisted solely upon the importance of abstraction.

The large influence which Hulme has had on our present critical conceptions of Modernism has led us to accept his definitions of Worringer's theories as valid, a position which I hope to contest. Paul Frankl has said of Worringer that 'laymen have overestimated [his] works, while scholars of art have underestimated them...He touched a deeper layer of the problems of form than many another a scholar, and we, too, must seek to delve into this layer without renouncing the task of formulating clear concepts'.²⁹ There is indeed a necessity to 'delve' into Worringer's thought, for nowhere has it been properly analysed in terms of its relevance to the development of British Modernism. Moreover, the exposition of Worringer most familiar to critics, that of T.E. Hulme, had as its purpose not the formulation of 'clear concepts', but quite

the reverse: the obfuscation of its dialectical principles for the furtherance of objectivist aesthetics.

2.2 The Basic Principles of Worringer's Thesis

Worringer explains that the history of philosophical and aesthetic interpretation had, since the Renaissance, been conducted exclusively from a psychological predisposition towards empathy: the world understood on the analogy of human principles. Proclaiming this to be only half the picture, he describes a contrary position in which nothing can be cognized of the world by the subject. Following Hegel, he lends this epistemological antinomy the structure of a racial paradigm and cites various art-forms as overall justification for his thesis. Thus on the one hand he argues that, unable to comprehend the world around them, certain peoples take refuge in objective or abstract form; on the other hand, there are peoples characterized by an ability to invest the world with their own vital confidence – to hold an empathic relationship with their environment: 'Whereas the precondition for the urge to empathy is a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world, the urge to abstraction is the outcome of a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world; in a religious respect it corresponds to a strongly transcendental tinge to all notions.'³⁰ Therefore, aesthetically speaking, we have two extremes represented, respectively, by classical naturalism and primitivistic abstraction.

Worringer's philosophy, however, embraces more than the identification of these two epistemological and aesthetic polarities. What is of greater interest to him is the identification of a synthesis of this antinomy. This synthesis, in terms both psychological and art-historical, he identifies as Gothic. Hegel had posited three racial/psychological archetypes and their corresponding forms of expression: life-alien Orientalism, anthropomorphic Classicism and, finally, Gothic, the synthesis of these antithetical inclinations. Worringer tries to make sense of this synthesis. If it was the case, as he argues, that Oriental man had passed beyond the hope of ever celebrating a knowledge of the world, then there could be no hope of reconciling such epistemological pessimism with the anthropological confidences of Classicism in order to arrive at a melioristic Gothic. Therefore, in order to explain the Gothic synthesis, Worringer ventures the existence of another form of abstraction which does not exist *after* all possibilities of cognition are exhausted, but *before* cognition. This he claims to be a specifically Northern primitivism which, although baffled by the world initially, is

eventually able to lend that world an anthropomorphic explanation and to humanize its initially transcendental conceptions.

Northern man, therefore, is able to approach the anthropomorphism of the Classical outlook, not remaining forever limited to such a possibility as must be his Oriental counterpart. When Worringer draws an analogy between the failings of primitive understanding and the uncertainties of modern epistemology, these are not the absolute resignations of Oriental abstractionism – they are the attestation of a Northern mind in hope of progress.

2.3 Reconsidering Worringer

The chief misinterpretation of Worringer can, in fact, be attributed to just this last assumption. It is true that Worringer sought to draw attention to the one-sided nature of modern philosophical and aesthetic interpretation and, indeed, to argue for a reappraisal of those types of art which had suffered from such a critical bias. It is true again that he hints at a correlation between these early types of abstract art and artistic developments taking place at his time of writing. Furthermore, it is true that he draws an equivalence between the uncertainties of modern epistemology and the uncertainties of primitive interpretations of the world. But such analogies are only drawn with reference to *Northern* primitivism and *Northern* abstraction – an abstraction in constant hope of humanization – and not the different tradition of absolute transcendental abstractionism characterizing Oriental man.

Commentators suppose a rigid distinction between the ideas of abstraction and empathy, and too readily suppose Worringer's conceptions of abstraction as a straightforward battle cry for a new formalism in contemporary art. There is very little appreciation of his conception of Gothic, or of the precise *type* of abstraction from which it develops. T.E. Hulme, for instance, never considers Worringer's definition of Gothic – only Classical naturalism preconditioned by empathy, which he repudiates, and the lifeless abstractions of transcendently disposed cultures, to which he lends his full support.

Worringer, then, deserves new attention. It is not enough to claim that he provides a reaction against all ideas of empathy and returns us to a conception of form as necessarily abstract. The failure to identify the notion of the Gothic synthesis in Worringer's equations is by no means confined to Hulme alone. It is a strange fact that Vernon Lee, who, as an empathy theorist should be so keen to anchor Worringer's

definitions of abstraction to what she has described as Kant's 'organic intellectual necessities', also overlooks the essentially dialectical nature of his thesis:

Wörringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Munich, 1911), reacting against the theories which derive artistic form from utilitarian or technical necessities and desire for imitation, boldly asserts that only that should be considered art (he excludes the work of cave-dwellers, children, and much primitive representative art) which obeys either the desire for anthropomorphic empathy or that for geometric abstraction and negation of the organic, two desires he treats as opposed and as explaining all the history of art by their warfare and their alliances...I will only remark that the author, like all aestheticians, confuses the various kinds of empathy, confining it to organic form, and explaining by a supposed horror of life those so-called geometrical forms whose peculiarities depend upon formal-dynamic empathy.³¹

As has been argued, Worringer does not segregate his definitions of these two poles of artistic expression – he seeks, rather, their 'ideal reconciliation' in the highest forms of Northern expression. A later theorist to argue Worringer's import with respect to the history of Modernist aesthetics is Rudolph Arnheim. In a work of 1986 he states that:

Worringer, too, was of the opinion that geometric shapes enter early styles of art through the action of 'laws of nature' and that they are implicit not only in inorganic matter but in the human mind as well. Primitive man did not need to look at crystals to conceive of such shapes. Geometric abstraction is rather a 'pure self-creation derived from the conditions of the human organism.' Nevertheless, there is no room in Worringer's thought for the observation on which we would insist nowadays, namely, that an intense expression of life is evident in styles of art whose abstractness is supposed to be due to an escape from the organic, for instance, in African and Romanesque sculpture.³²

Whilst Arnheim's initial proposition is true, that Worringer's definitions of abstraction comprise the notion that the creation of abstract form was based upon the structures of organic matter, his second assertion needs closer attention for it tends to inaccuracy. Worringer's descriptions of the Gothic artistic volition detail precisely the tendency Arnheim criticizes Worringer for neglecting: the Gothic volition, which according to Worringer may be traced throughout the entire aesthetic development of the North from its earliest ornamentation to the present day, is one in which a strident and dynamic expression of life is evident within schematic abstract forms. It is true indeed when Arnheim concludes that 'our own thinking has yet to meet the challenge of accounting

for the wider range of ways in which the arts represent the world of human experience with the help of organized form' (p.61).

2.4 Worringer's Methodology: Problems of Interpretation

Worringer deliberately conflates his methodology with the substance of his thought: his thesis self-consciously demonstrates the cultural *geist* of which he considers himself an unavoidable representative. The content of Worringer's thought is nothing other than a synchronic, allegorical representation of his philosophical procedure: if the psychology of Gothic man is defined as synthetic, then Worringer lends his analysis a synthetic structure. This being the case, we note an immediate and quite deliberate antinomy in the arrangement of his thought. Propositions derived from the subjective realms of psychological induction (empathy) collide with a quasi-theological supposition of absolute values (abstraction). Worringer's methodology does nothing more than display what Lee had termed 'the central problem of aesthetics': its subjective premise continually attempts to extend itself, by a leap of faith, into a statement of objective truth. With this understood, it is easy to conceive how his thesis might serve towards the definition of a new aesthetic idealism. Yet Worringer's philosophical structure can never serve this latter purpose with outright justification. The dialectical pattern of his thought concludes the eventual impossibility of such absolutist aspirations. His work, like Gothic man which it features, remains within the limitations of its own imaginative capabilities.

Wilhelm Worringer's most influential works, *Abstraction and Empathy* and *Form in Gothic*, describe a history of art with reference to the idea of the *Kunstwollen* or 'will to form', described as 'that latent inner demand which exists *per se*, entirely independent of the object and of the mode of creation, and behaves as will to form. It is the primary factor in all artistic creation and, in its innermost essence, every work of art is simply an objectification of this *a priori* existent absolute artistic volition'.³³ This being so, Worringer claimed that art-historical analysis could no longer pass judgements with respect to the ability or technique of the artist, but the psychological motivation underlying the work.³⁴ As such, Worringer reveals to us the historiographic method he uses in order to ascertain the 'psychology' of art:

Directly the historian endeavours to progress from the bare discovery and establishment of historical facts to the interpretation of these same facts, mere empiricism and induction no longer suffice. At this stage he must fall back on his faculty for divination. From the inanimate

historical material at his disposal he must proceed to infer the immaterial conditions to which that material owed its existence. This is an inference in the region of the unknown, of the unknowable, for which no security, other than that of intuition, is to be found.³⁵

According to Worringer, the art-historian is faced with forms whose value cannot be derived by means of straightforward empirical analysis: they have no absolute objective value from which we may deduce a meaning. This is because any meaning that is constructed in relation to these forms is tempered by our own particular consciousness, which in turn is dependent upon the exigencies of racial and cultural circumstance. Therefore, argues Worringer, if it is the case that we can only understand form that is 'external' to us in terms of the meanings which we attribute to it, our interpretation must be of a subjective nature and remain uncoloured by attempts at scientific analysis loaded with the fallacious materialistic presuppositions of our age: in actual fact, we have no security other than that offered us by our intuitive relation to form. We must read the abstract and inanimate forms of history, constituted by the art object, according to the limitations of our own rational capacities. If this is the case then all history is constituted of an *a priori* synthetic relationship held between the psychological volition (will to form) of a people and a projected reality whose objectivity can never be intellectually or scientifically verified:

We must repeat that these hypotheses do not sin against absolute historical objectivity, that is to say, against historical actuality, for knowledge of the latter is denied to us and its investigation may be described as a fancy with the same justice as the investigation of the existence and nature of 'the thing in itself' (*Ding-an-sich*) was called by Kant a mere fancy. The historical truth we seek is something quite other than historical actuality. 'History cannot be a replica of events "as they actually were," but only a remodelling of the actual events determined by the constructive aims of knowledge and *a priori* categories, a remodelling which makes the form, that is, the actual essence, of this kind of knowledge no less than of the knowledge of natural science, a product of our synthetic energies' (Simmel). (p.3)

There can be no objective judgements made about a form whose historical context is beyond the humanist vainglorious of scientific reconstruction. Yet neither is it possible to support the contention that there is an innate quality possessed by form: the theological idea of the 'thing-in-itself' existing abstractly in a sphere removed from our own organic experience, and whose meaning is explicable only with reference to traditional metaphysics. Instead of these equally flawed perspectives, we are offered a

synthetic alternative – the interpretation of history and its forms according to *a priori* categories which are not conceptual, but psychological.

Such a position, however, although depending upon the organic limitations of subjective psychological rather than objective metaphysical principles, immediately leads us into realms of pure speculation and obscurantism, the dangers of which have been thoroughly referenced in the preceding chapter. The mind, having renounced empiricism, begins to wonder whether it is not able to reconstruct for itself some new absolute:

Since we are instinctively aware that all knowledge is merely indirect – fettered as it is by the time-conditioned Ego – no possibility of widening the capacity for historical knowledge exists other than by widening our Ego. Now such an extension of the field of knowledge is not possible in practice, but only by virtue of an ideal auxiliary construction of purely antithetical application. From the firm basis of our positive Ego, by means of an ideal duplication of our Ego around its opposite, we project into the boundless realms of history a more extensive sphere of knowledge. For all the possibilities of historical understanding always lie upon that spherical surface spread out between our positive Ego, with its temporal limitations, and its opposite pole, the direct antithesis of our Ego, accessible to us only by means of an ideal construction. To vindicate the right to such an ideal auxiliary construction as an heuristic principle is the nearest approach to a possible suppression of historical realism and its pretentious shortsightedness. Let the results, if they must, be of a merely hypothetical character! (pp.2-3)

Worringer writes of an 'ideal auxiliary construction' antithetical to the ego which would enable the ego, limited by its position in time and space, the ability to expand into 'the boundless realms of history'. Worringer, in reaction to short-sighted, mechanistic determinations of history infers the creation of a purely spiritual and abstract realm of experience distinct from any practical relation with the world. He begins a psychological reconstruction of metaphysical realms in which the 'thing-in-itself' can exist independently of all subjective involvement, in which objective knowledge is once again possible, the mind being tired of the limitations it had set itself with respect to an idealized pure reason. Worringer apparently fulfils the criteria detailed by Vernon Lee at the start of this thesis which qualifies him as a Will-to-Believe Pragmatist. He himself describes perfectly the tendency towards Pragmatic inversion which she identifies:

Only after the human spirit has passed, in thousands of years of its evolution, along the whole course of rationalistic cognition, does the feeling for the 'thing in itself' re-awaken in it as the

final resignation of knowledge. That which was previously instinct is now the ultimate product of cognition. Having slipped down from the pride of knowledge, man is now just as lost and helpless *vis-à-vis* the world picture as primitive man, once he has recognised that 'this visible world in which we are is the work of Maya, brought forth by magic, a transitory and in itself unsubstantial semblance, comparable to the optical illusion and the dream, of which it is equally false and equally true to say that it is, as that it is not' (Schopenhauer, *Kritik der Kantischen Philosophie*).³⁶

So it is that on one level Worringer's work appears to provide a perfect example of the anthropological, psychological, mythical and analytic-metaphysical perspective identified by Lee: it deploys all those anthropomorphic disciplines which she considered to have usefully 'undermined what used to be called *religious truths*'. Yet his work appears to offer at the same time a description of life as mystery founded upon 'reason's criticism of its own nature' and consequentially introduces the supposition of transcendental realities beyond the grasp of human understanding: the existence of the 'thing-in-itself' – which Worringer had himself concurred with Kant in terming a 'fancy' – removed from the contingencies of organic life and subjective participation.

By looking at Worringer's metaphorical application of these epistemological questions we can gauge more precisely the nature of his philosophical position. Having done so, it will be discovered that his loyalty resides finally with Kant's view that, no matter how hard it tries, the mind can never invest itself in an Aristotelian point beyond the organic necessities of the subject, that every abstraction, in the end, is informed by an emotive origin.

2.5 The Dialectical-Synthetic Basis of Worringer's Thesis

Worringer's methodology might seem at first to suggest a Will-to-Believe Pragmatism, taking as its purpose the restoration of transcendental conceptions of form. He draws an analogy between the aesthetic inclinations of primitive or Oriental peoples whose comprehension of the world is strictly limited and contemporary man who has arrived at a similar position. Having repudiated the force of reason and the ability of science to decode and explain man's situation in the world, the tendency is towards the belief in another force greater than humanity and an equivalent immolation of the self through the creation of life-negating form. This is certainly the received reading of Worringer's thesis but it is by no means an unchallengeable interpretation. It

is my contention that Worrringer's real interest is to be located in that type of art which he considered the synthesis of the tendencies to abstraction and empathy – Northern art or Gothic. Here, any tendency to abstraction always has as its ultimate motivating factor some feeling for, or observation of, life.

The urge to abstraction corresponds to a transcendental religious conception; removed from correspondence with the organic, this volition seeks an absolute validation beyond an area of immediate experience:

Recollection of the lifeless form of a pyramid or of the suppression of life that is manifested, for instance, in Byzantine mosaics tells us at once that here the need for empathy, which for obvious reasons always tends toward the organic, cannot possibly have determined artistic volition. Indeed, the idea forces itself upon us that here we have an impulse directly opposed to the empathy impulse, which seeks to suppress precisely that in which the need for empathy finds its satisfaction.³⁷

The description of inert pyramidal form as an archetypal representation of Eastern pessimism, or resignation in the face of inexplicable transcendentalism, finds an earlier exponent in G.W.F. Hegel, who claimed in his *Aesthetics* that:

the Pyramids put before our eyes the simple prototype of symbolical art itself; they are prodigious crystals which conceal in themselves an inner meaning and, as external shapes produced by art, they so envelop that meaning that it is obvious that they are there for this inner meaning separated from pure nature and only in relation to this meaning. But this realm of death and the invisible, which here constitutes the meaning, possesses only one side, and that a formal one, of the true content of art, namely that of being removed from immediate existence; and so this realm is primarily only Hades, not yet a life which, even if liberated from the sensuous as such, is still nevertheless at the same time self-existent and therefore in itself free and living spirit.³⁸

This seminal form of artistic expression Hegel terms Symbolical. The forms created are 'separated from pure nature' and 'immediate existence' and have not yet achieved the possibility of a self-contained 'life' of any kind. But the last inference made by Hegel – proceeding from his dialectical contention that this type of art provides only with 'one side, and that a formal one, of the true content of art' – that there is the possibility of self-contained life 'even if liberated from the sensuous as such', is a crucial one, suggesting as it does the existence of abstract form which yet has some inner-motivation. In fact this idea forms a fundamental principle of Hegel's aesthetic

and is appropriated by Worringer in whose work it gains paramount significance. For it introduces to us the concept of an artistic volition peculiar to the Northern races, in which the tendencies to abstraction and empathy converge.

The urge to abstraction found, according to Worringer, 'its first satisfaction in pure geometric abstraction, which, set free from all external connections with the world, represents a felicitation whose mysterious transfiguration emanates not from the observer's intellect, but from the deepest roots of his somato-psychic constitution'.³⁹ Once again, although geometric abstraction is 'set free from all external connections with the world' the transfiguration it undergoes is still based upon a 'somato-psychic constitution'. In other words, there is still an organic basis to this mode of creation although it is a 'mysterious' and inexplicable one. There is still an undetermined link through to empirical and physical conditions: to a particular organic, imaginative, non-theological disposition.

The urge to abstraction, even at its most austere stage, is described according to its subjective provenance and anticipates the description of an increasing exchange between it and its apparent polar antithesis, the urge to empathy. Although the anthropological confidences of reflective interpretation do not feature in the urge towards the establishment of absolute form, the nature of the forms themselves provide a clue as to their human origin:

It would be a misconception of the psychological preconditions for the genesis of this abstract art form, to say that a craving for regularity led men to reach out for geometric regularity, for that would presuppose a spiritual-intellectual penetration of abstract form, would make it appear the product of reflection and calculation. We have more justification for assuming that what we see here is a purely instinctive creation, that the urge to abstraction created this form for itself with elemental necessity and without the intervention of the intellect. Precisely because intellect had not yet dimmed instinct, the disposition to regularity, which after all is already present in the germ-cell, was able to find the appropriate abstract expression. (p.19)

Although the urge to abstraction does not base itself upon organic form which is consciously or scientifically known by us, the organic basis of that external world is implicit within the organization of our subconsciousness, for 'we cannot suppose man to have picked up these laws, namely the laws of abstract regularity, from inanimate matter; it is, rather, an intellectual necessity for us to assume that these laws are also implicitly contained in our own human organisation – though all attempts to advance our knowledge on this point stop short at logical conjectures' (p.20). Abstract patterns

that are produced as a result of this particular aesthetic volition reproduce the organic features of the experiential world, albeit in an indeterminate way beyond the power of 'logical conjectures'.

The sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, in a small volume on aesthetics which greatly influenced Worringer (and, indeed, his generation), claims 'a definite relation between three-dimensional objective form, i.e., an object in Nature, and its appearance psychologically as a visual perception'.⁴⁰ He presents the notion that the aesthetic significance of any work of art concerns the unity which the artist makes of, on the one hand, abstract visual impressions and, on the other, kinaesthetic ideas: the way in which a reconciliation is sought between a world of two dimensional impression and the corporeal realm from which that impression derives. Hildebrand claims that it is the artist's task to present to the contemplating subject a 'unified idea of the form of the object' (p.32), and that 'to accomplish this end is the sculptor's real problem. For it does not follow that forms which are expressive when perceived stereoscopically, or separately at close range, should continue to be so when presented in the visual projection. The unity of a sculptor's work must, therefore, depend on its pictorial clearness' (pp.32-33).

The artist's problem is with the translation of organic form into a medium which is served by the visual plane: the attempt to give a sense of wholeness of the object in an abstract medium. For the simple attempt to imitate nature 'by translating kinaesthetic ideas, piece by piece, into visual factors and then adding them together into one total appearance' (p.38) would result in the disunity which aesthetic form seeks to avoid:

The purpose of sculpture is not to put the spectator in a hap-hazard and troubled state regarding the three dimensional or cubic aspect of things, leaving him to do the best he may in forming his visual ideas. The real aim is to give him instantly a perfectly clear visual idea and thus remove the disturbing problem of cubic form. So long as the chief effect of any plastic figure is its reality as a solid, it is imperfect as a work of art. It is only when the figure, though in reality a solid, gains its effect as a plane picture, that it attains artistic form, that is to say, perfection for our sense of vision. (pp.95-96)

It is this idea of the 'troubled state regarding the three dimensional or cubic aspect of things' which heavily influences Worringer's definition of primitive man attempting to release himself from the bewildering flux of the phenomenal world by aspiring to purely idealistic form. Indeed, states Worringer, 'let anyone to whom this thesis of man's primal need to free the sensuous object from the unclarity imposed upon it by its

three-dimensionality, by means of artistic representation seems contrived and far-fetched, recall that a modern artist, and a sculptor at that, has once more felt this need very strongly'.⁴¹ Significantly, however, Hildebrand's definition of art, to which Worringer is here referring, does not preclude nature; in fact, it states that art is predicated on natural form, and that the observer is able to revitalize the purely visual form offered him in accordance with the sense of the organic it awakens in him:

In the resting form we can already divine its mode of functioning. The organic body we conceive as a complex of forms bearing the impress of certain functional possibilities. The feeling for organic life depends on our ability to imagine all these forms in action; the perception of organic unity depends on our ability to put our bodily feelings entirely into the body pictured before us.⁴²

A successful reading of purely visual form depends upon the observer's ability to reconstitute the vitality of that abstracted image according to his own functional constitution, according to his pleasures and pains:

The functional value of which we now speak absolutely presupposes the spatial; taken apart from this spatial value, it appeals only to a mental process of the observer, failing utterly to present him with Nature's real appearance. But a complete and true Art is manifest only when both these factors are duly regarded, or, more correctly, when the unity of the functional values is conceived as a unity of spatial values. (p.111)

Thus Vernon Lee, supporting a dialectical conception of empathy, can in part base her philosophical claims on Hildebrand, stressing the importance of his idea that art, whilst attaining to a degree of autonomy, is structured around the kinetic and psychological states of the human condition:

the differentiating characteristic of art is that it makes *you think back to the shape* once that shape has conveyed its message or done its business of calling your attention or exciting your emotions. And the first and foremost problem, for instance of painting, is that of preventing the beholder's eye from being carried, by lines of perspective, outside the frame and even persistently out of the centre of the picture; the sculptor (and this is the real reason of the sculptor Hildebrand's rules for plastic composition) obeying a similar necessity of keeping the beholder's eye upon the main masses of his statue, instead of diverting it, by projections at different distances, like the sticking out arms and hands of Roman figures.⁴³

The work of art as 'shape' has an integrity of its own, but does not exist in a purely abstract fashion; as Hildebrand claims, the mission of art is to 'reestablish [sic] and make felt the sound and natural relations between our thought and sense activities',⁴⁴ and to privilege neither one nor the other. It is important that Hildebrand stresses the necessity of both spatial and functional value. An insistence upon functional value alone would result in a crude realism which did not take into account the formal demands of artistic representation, whereas a purely spatial conception of art would serve the interests of the rational mind alone and be void of all experiential content. Worringer's aesthetic commits itself to this same exchange between organic-functional and abstract-spatial categories. It is clear that his definition of the Northern will to form, and more particularly Gothic, rests upon the notion of a tortuous vacillation between body and spirit. The empathic volition is able to live itself out in abstract form for as Hildebrand had made clear, 'it is evident that this vitalizing force of our ideas is in no way restricted to living things, but extends over the whole of Nature. It is thus that we are able to bring ourselves into relation with everything and to saturate each object with our bodily feelings' (p.104).

2.6 The 'Northern Volition'

It is Worringer's contention that there can be a dialectical exchange between these two realms of abstraction and empathy, that if organic form can be lifted from the temporal and contingent into an area of abstraction, then the resulting abstraction is just as prone to apprehension by a psychological volition ordered towards empathy. And this is the essential point upon which we need to insist: being the ultimate products of subjective psychological motivations, either one of these tendencies may be modified by the other. Although the tendency to abstraction attempts to lift subjective experience into an irrefragable realm of the absolute, it can never actually do so and must always be brought back down to earth, 'for only in the reproduction of this closed whole of the imagination could man find an approximate substitute for the absolute material individuality of the thing, which is forever beyond his reach'.⁴⁵

Worringer states that 'we found the need for empathy and the need for abstraction to be the two poles of human artistic experience, in so far as it is accessible to purely aesthetic evaluation. They are antitheses which, in principle, are mutually exclusive. In actual fact, however, the history of art represents an unceasing disputation between

the two tendencies' (p.45). This 'disputation' intensifies at a particular stage of history until the two tendencies are inextricable. Worringer talks of

the process, which is of great importance to ornament and the history of architecture, in which the need for empathy abandons the sphere of the organic, that naturally falls to its lot, and takes possession of abstract forms, which are thereby, of course, robbed of their abstract value. This aesthetic mechanism, as Lipps calls it, is very much in evidence precisely in the Northern artistic volition, and it may be said...that it finds its apotheosis in Gothic. (p.48)

Although Northern primitivism in its earliest stages of expression consists of a pure geometric abstraction arising from an instinctive reaction to the inexplicable conditions of the external world and of life, as man's capacity for some kind of cognition increases so his familiarity with the surrounding world leads him towards the incorporation of aspects of that world into his expression. Therefore, 'unable to rest content with this absolute form' (p.36), man's aim was:

to approximate to that absolute value the single thing of the external world which most strongly captured his attention, ie. to tear it out of the flux of happening, to free it from all contingency and caprice, to raise it up into the realm of the necessary, in a word, to eternalise it. Since it was no longer possible to achieve absolute abstraction once there was an underlying natural model, all fulfilment could be only approximate fulfilment. And the relation between the creator and the natural model was not harmless delight in copying it in its reality, and enjoying the concordance between the rendering and the object, but a conflict between the man and the natural object which he sought to wrest from its temporality and unclarity. This conflict was bound always to end with a victory that was at the same time a defeat. (pp.36-37)

This is a significant development for it implies that there is no longer a volition concerned solely with, as Hegel calls it when describing the psychological motivations behind the formal disposition of the pyramid, the 'realm of death and the invisible'. Although the form in question has been, remembering Hegel again, 'liberated from the sensuous', it derives some existence in accordance with the desire of its creator, has 'captured his attention', has not been sought as an absolute other to experience but has been based upon a natural model. A form has been 'rescued' from the flux of experience because it held some value of satisfaction to the artist, he felt for it some rudimentary empathy.

The possibility of empathizing with abstract form provides the basis for Worringer's definitions of the Northern artistic volition in its nascent, pre-Renaissance stages: 'the naïve Northern nature religion, with its cloudy mysticism, knew nothing of that deep dread which we felt in the Oriental-Semitic religion of transcendence. It stood *before* cognition, whereas the religion of the Oriental stood *above* cognition' (p.107). Worringer postulates that 'Northern man felt only a veil betwixt nature and himself, a veil that he believed he would one day be able to raise. The problematic nature of all cognition had not yet dawned on him' (p.108). Therefore, this early typically Northern art was abstract in that it eschewed a celebration of the little understood natural world, but was not of the type which sought a complete cessation of communication with the temporal and the sensual; rather was it motivated by an obscure and frustrated feeling for the life from which it was excluded. Thus Worringer can claim of Celtic strapwork that, although such art was dominated by inorganic formal considerations:

Yet all these linear-geometric convolutions are never reduced to the simplest abstract formula, never carried through to clear necessity and regularity; rather is there expression in them, a seeking and striving that goes beyond abstract tranquillity and exclusivity. This complicated, opaque, and seemingly arbitrary mode of linear decoration could never have satisfied the artistic volition of Oriental peoples. Here there was, so to speak, merely the material for abstraction, but never abstraction itself. All the restless searching and striving after knowledge, all the inner disharmony appears in this heightened expression of the inanimate. The lucid consciousness of the impossibility of knowledge, absolute passive resignation, had led the Oriental artistic volition to that expressionless tranquillity and necessity of the abstract; here in the North, however, there is anything but tranquillity, here an inner need for expression desires, in spite of all the inner disharmony – or rather all the more so because of it – to speak itself out. (pp.108-109)

2.7 Northern Man, Christianity and the Cathedral

Worringer argues that the psychology of early Northern man would quickly allow him to feel an affinity for a Christian system in which there is no absolute disconnection between man and God, but in which scholastic abstractions combine with a mystical humanism. This has as its aesthetic analogue the great Gothic cathedrals with their abstract-schematic exteriors and their sensuously subjective interiors, 'for scholasticism is likewise the climax of an effort to express an inner, living religious sensibility with abstract-schematic concepts, just as Gothic is the apotheosis of mechanical laws of

construction, heightened in their expression by the capacity for empathy' (p.113). The Gothic cathedral, exemplary icon of the Northern aesthetic volition, approaches its abstractions empathically:

Faced with a Gothic cathedral, the question of whether its inner constitution is organic-living or abstract would throw us into perplexity. – By inner constitution we understand what may be described as the soul of a building, the mysterious inner power of its nature. Now the first thing we feel with the Gothic cathedral is a strong appeal to our capacity for empathy, and yet we shall hesitate to describe its inner constitution as organic. This hesitation will be strengthened if we think of the organic constitution of a Classical Greek edifice. Here in the Classical edifice the concepts organic and empathy are completely co-extensive; here an organic life is substituted for matter; it obeys not only its own mechanical laws, but is subordinated, along with its laws, to an artistic volition replete with feeling for organic life. In the Gothic cathedral, on the contrary, matter lives solely on its own mechanical laws; but these laws, despite their fundamentally abstract character, have become living, i.e. they have acquired expression. Man has transferred his capacity for empathy onto mechanical values. Now they are no longer a dead abstraction to him, but a living movement of forces. And only in this heightened movement of forces, which in their intensity of expression surpass all organic motion, was Northern man able to gratify his need for expression, which had been intensified to the point of pathos by inner disharmony. Gripped by the frenzy of these mechanical forces, that thrust out at all their terminations and aspire toward heaven in a mighty crescendo of orchestral music, he feels himself convulsively drawn aloft in blissful vertigo, raised high above himself into the infinite. How remote he is from the harmonious Greeks, for whom all happiness was to be sought in the balanced tranquillity of gentle organic movement, which is alien to all ecstasy. (pp.112-113)

Worringer claims that the impulse towards empathy is preconditioned by an anthropomorphic confidence in the external world and might be perfectly exemplified by the naturalistic expression of Classicism and Renaissance neo-Classicism. Form resulting from this empathy impulse lives according to laws which are themselves projections of organic laws: the Classical temple is rendered an architectural trope of organic experience. The Gothic structure, however, lives on its own laws and its expressive form is not subsumed by a celebration of organic or sensuous principles: 'All expression to which Greek architecture attained was attained *through* the stone, *by means of* the stone; all expression to which Gothic architecture attained, was attained – and this is the full significance of the contrast – *in spite of* the stone. Its expression

was not derived from the material but from the negation of it, by means only of its dematerialization.' ⁴⁶

Despite, however, this dematerializing intention, the laws of the Gothic volition do not exist in total lifeless abstraction; they are, conversely, impelled by a feeling of vitality or expressiveness which is denied full and unimpeded expression in its natural realm of the purely organic. The abstraction of the Gothic form is therefore neither the abstraction of early primitive or Oriental abstraction nor does it share in the empathy of the Classical edifice. It is a quite specific volition arising from a synthesis of the psychological inclinations posited as the causal factors of its polar relations.

The criterion of the organic is always the harmonious, the balanced, the inwardly calm, into whose movement and rhythm we can without difficulty flow with the vital sensation of our own organisms. In absolute antithesis to the Greek idea of architecture we have, on the other hand, the Egyptian pyramid, which calls a halt to our empathy impulse and presents itself to us as a purely crystalline, abstract construct. A third possibility now confronts us in the Gothic cathedral, which indeed operates with abstract values, but nonetheless directs an extremely strong and forcible appeal to our capacity for empathy.⁴⁷

Oswald Spengler, working like Worringer in a philosophical register much influenced by Hegel, considers the cathedral to represent this same ideal synthesis of a generic Northern volition with Christian scholasticism:

In the myth of the Holy Grail and its Knights one can feel the inward necessity of the German-Northern Catholicism. In opposition to the Classical sacrifices offered to individual gods in separate temples, there is here the *one never-ending* sacrifice repeated everywhere and every day. This is the Faustian idea of the 9th-11th Centuries, the Edda time, foreshadowed by Anglo-Saxon missionaries like Winfried but only then ripened. The Cathedral, with its High Altar enclosing the accomplished miracle, is its expression in stone.⁴⁸

Worringer shares Spengler's sense of an 'inward necessity', and for him the growth of a sensuousness of feeling in the theological sphere, expressed architecturally by an increased emphasis on the subjective appeal of interiors, is symptomatic of a greater epochal change, an approach to a new sensibility: 'We see that in mysticism personal spiritual experience becomes the vehicle of divine knowledge, and this shows us that, in the relationship of Northern man to the world, a change of temperature has taken place; there has been a gain in warmth and confidence.'⁴⁹

In his work *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* of 1951, Erwin Panofsky could mark this same movement towards an increasingly 'empathic' reading of spiritual, spatial qualities. For him, late Gothic art 'records, to borrow Ockham's term, the direct *intuitus* from subject to object, thus paving the way for modern "naturalism" and lending visual expression to the concept of the infinite'.⁵⁰ Panofsky, in order to demonstrate this increasingly subjective perception of artistic form, has recourse to the same structural analogy as Worringer. Writing of the Late Gothic church hall he posits that 'its barnlike [sic] shell encloses an often wildly pictorial and always apparently boundless interior and thus creates a space determinate and impenetrable from without but indeterminate and penetrable from within' (p.43). In other words, the abstractions of the exterior appear to frustrate any attempt at subjective involvement but, in fact, enclose an interior which allows an intuitive communication with spiritual abstractions sensually perceived. Spengler claims that 'the Faustian soul looks for an immortality to follow the bodily end, a sort of marriage with endless space, and it disembodies the stone in its Gothic thrust system (contemporary, we may note, with the "consecutives" in Church music) till at last nothing remained visible but the indwelling depth- and height-energy of this self-extension' (I, 188). Yet for Spengler, as for Worringer, this spatial, disembodied and spiritual expressiveness becomes increasingly subject to re-sensualization.

In the beginning, rigid symbolism had petrified everything alive; the Gothic statue was not permitted to be a living body, but was simply a set of lines disposed in human form. But now Ornament loses all its sacred rigour and becomes more and more decoration for the architectural setting of a polite and mannered life. It was purely as this, namely *as a beautifying* element, that Renaissance taste was adopted by the courtly and patrician world of the North (and by it alone!). (I, 197)

2.8 Hegel's Epochal Model

Hegel, in his *Aesthetics*, claimed that the whole foundation of his own theory consisted in 'recognizing that the beauty of art is one of the means which dissolve and reduce to unity the above-mentioned opposition and contradiction between the abstractly self-concentrated spirit and nature – both the nature of external phenomena and that of inner subjective feeling and emotion' (I, 56). It can be argued that Worringer's thesis searches for this same reconciliation, a claim which gains substance

when the provenance of his historical model may be located in the epochal analogies drawn by Hegel. Thus for Hegel the original primitive aesthetic motivation consists in a quest of the spirit which 'could only assert itself as an external form for meanings drawn from nature or for impersonal abstract ideas drawn from the substantial inner life, and it was these which formed the real centre of this form of art' (I, 517). As has been seen with reference to Worringer this type of art, which Hegel terms Symbolical, might be adequately illustrated through that Oriental archetype, the pyramid.

The next type of art, for Hegel, is Classical art which 'did not remain, as it did at the first stage, purely superficial, indeterminate, and not penetrated by its content; on the contrary, the perfection of art reached its peak here precisely because the spiritual was completely drawn through its external appearance; in this beautiful unification it idealized the natural and made it into an adequate embodiment of spirit's own substantial individuality' (I, 517). The spirit does not justify itself with reference to its own formal laws but expresses itself as an embodiment of the natural: sensuous reality is apprehended and used as an appropriate existence of spirit. Spirit is drawn through external appearance, an idea which would lead Worringer to claim that 'the Greek architect approached his material, stone, with a certain sensuousness and therefore allowed the material to express itself as such'.⁵¹

The next stage is the Romantic form of art, by which we may assume Hegel means the Gothic art of the Middle Ages. Here the spirit which had been sensualized according to Classical forms of expression retreats back into itself and embraces a reconciliation with itself as pure spirit:

For at the stage of romantic art the spirit knows that its truth does not consist in its immersion in corporeality; on the contrary, it only becomes sure of its truth by withdrawing from the external into its own intimacy with itself and positing external reality as an existence inadequate to itself. Even if, therefore this new content too comprises in itself the task of making itself *beautiful*, still beauty in the sense hitherto expounded remains for it something subordinate, and beauty becomes the *spiritual* beauty of the absolute inner life as inherently infinite spiritual subjectivity. (I, 518)

With its insistence upon a spiritual beauty removed from an existence in nature which is inadequate to it, Hegel's definition of Romantic form might recall that earlier stage of lifeless abstraction described with reference to Oriental types of art; but this confusion must be avoided. For the same reason that Worringer's definition of Gothic art with its synthetic abstract/empathic tendency is not recognized, and his definition of abstraction is received according to its most basic and polar description, so here a

misunderstanding might easily arise concerning the difference between the original abstractive impulse of a primitive people and the aesthetic volition of the Romantic artist. It is actually the case that the Romantic form described by Hegel provides Worringer with his descriptions of a tendency in which subjectivity is made the underlying principle of spirituality, in which empathy lays hold of abstraction and in which all absolutes are anthropomorphized:

But therefore to attain its infinity the spirit must all the same lift itself out of purely formal and *finite* personality into the *Absolute* ; i.e. the spiritual must bring itself into representation as the subject filled with what is purely substantial and, therein, as the willing and self-knowing subject. Conversely, the substantial and the true must not be apprehended as a mere 'beyond' of humanity, and the anthropomorphism of the Greek outlook must not be stripped away; but the human being, as actual subjectivity, must be made the principle, and thereby alone...does the anthropomorphic reach its consummation. (I, 518-519)

The human being, as absolute subjectivity, is made the principle of absolute expression. The sensual and the spiritual enter into an immediate and ceaseless exchange: the subject-object relation is dissolved in a new synthesis peculiar to the Romantic North. It is from this Hegelian premise that Worringer conceives his own definition of an apotheosis of the Northern will to form:

What is here associated irreconcilably, and to our modern eye unmeaningly, attains to an ideal reconciliation in the highest stage of Northern development – more especially in the graphic art of a Holbein and a Dürer. Here naturalism and spiritual expression are no longer opposed; they are brought into a connection which is no longer outward but inward. Although the spiritualizing intent has lost its great force, it has become so highly sublimated, has become so much a matter of inwardness, that it can identify itself with the spiritual expression springing from the representation, that is to say, from the object represented itself. This spiritual expressiveness, therefore, is no longer forced on actuality from without, but is produced by it...This it was which first enabled the inherent expression of the line, its independent spiritual existence, to combine so happily with the subservient function of the line when dependent on the object, that the spiritual expressive value of the line became simultaneously the interpreter of the spiritual energy of the thing represented.⁵²

The pivotal importance of Hegel's postulations is to be located in the idea of an exchange between these two realms of the spiritual and the mortal, in which spirit is



internalized, brought down from on high and bound to subjectivity. This is precisely the position Worringer takes with respect to the 'ideal reconciliation' referred to, in which spiritual expression is sublimated so that it proceeds *from* the natural or organic configuration of the thing represented, rather than being imposed upon it from a realm of metaphysical abstractions. This exchange is not an easy one, a fact illustrated by the tortuous language in which it is phrased: a language in which super-expressive, abstract and conceptual descriptions of the Gothic form itself, with its frenzied orchestration and its aspirations towards the infinite, constantly speak with a sensual yearning and pathos – the language of Christian sacrifice.

Hegel's aesthetic prefigures this same frustrated logic, this same expressive anomaly, this theoretical asymptote in which the reconciliation of abstract spirit and life is attempted.

The true content of romantic art is absolute inwardness, and its corresponding form is spiritual subjectivity with its grasp of its independence and freedom. This inherently infinite and absolutely universal content is the absolute negation of everything particular, the simple unity with itself which has dissipated all external relations, all processes of nature and their periodicity of birth, passing away, and rebirth, all the restrictedness in spiritual *existence*, and dissolved all particular gods into a pure and infinite self-identity. (I, 519)

Such a statement would again suggest an alienation between the realms of an 'absolute inwardness' of spirit and the sensuous world of experience and life, of human existence. If the spirit withdraws from the corporeal, then it dwells in an abstract realm which has, beyond the satisfactions of a pure reason which Kant had shown to be redundant in any case, as little interest to sensuous humanity as the lifeless abstractions of the earliest forms of art. This is not, however, the case, as Hegel proves with an essential caveat, surprising us with the claim that, in actual fact, 'the Absolute does not turn out to be the one jealous God who merely cancels nature and finite human existence without shaping himself there in appearance as actual divine subjectivity; on the contrary, the true Absolute reveals itself and thereby gains an aspect in virtue of which it can be apprehended and represented by art' (I, 519-520). He continues:

God in his truth is therefore no bare ideal generated by imagination; on the contrary, he puts himself into the very heart of the finitude and external contingency of existence, and yet knows himself there as a divine subject who remains infinite in himself and makes this infinity explicit to himself. Since therefore the actual individual man is the appearance of God, art now wins for

the first time the higher right of turning the human form, and the mode of externality in general, into an expression of the Absolute, although the new task of art can only consist in bringing before contemplation in this human form not the immersion of the inner in external corporeality but, conversely, the withdrawal of the inner into itself, the spiritual consciousness of God in the individual. (I, 520)

The aesthetic impulse, following a change in the temper of man's religious sensibility, is one in which there is 'no bare ideal generated by the imagination' but rather in which the abstract spirit, although maintaining its spiritual purity, has increasingly as the basis of its expression a natural model and features in the 'contingency of existence'. Subjectivity is made the principle of spiritual expression as the Absolute comes down from its empyreal heights to become grounded in nature, as the change is effected from transcendence to pantheism, from a separation of God and man to an anthropocentric immanence. Worringer's description of the Gothic volition depicts the same exchange between spirit's infinitude and the natural world within which it increasingly features. In each instance the causal factor is the same:

For Northern mysticism had so little inner stability, so closely resembled the mist before sunrise, that it shrank back helpless before Roman practical rationalism, that carried in its wake Christianity as the State religion; filled with a befitting respect for the alien reason and the alien religion, it crept into all sorts of nooks and crannies. In contrast to Oriental mysticism, which was more than mere mist before sunrise, which was the most profound consciousness of the unfathomableness of the world.⁵³

The religious sensibility informing the Gothic artistic volition is a Christian one: God is discovered incarnate in man and is not forever removed in transcendental abstractions. The Christian religion provides Worringer, influenced by Hegel, with a model definition of empathy: in the same way that the interior of a church gives us a sensually articulated impression of spiritual infinitude, so the doctrine of God the father and Christ the son is nothing other than an attempt to understand religious abstractions on the analogy of human experience, by means of a 'practical rationalism':

Now space is something in itself spiritual and incomprehensible, and so in this its essential nature it eludes every formative energy which creates expression. For no expression can be given to anything we cannot comprehend. We can only comprehend space when we take from it its abstract character, when we substitute for it our conception as of something corporeal; in short, when we turn experience of space into an experience of the senses, abstract space into real

atmospheric space. Abstract space has no life, and no creative power can win from it expression; atmospheric space, on the contrary, has an inner life which acts directly upon our senses, thereby offering a foothold for our powers of formation.⁵⁴

2.9 Rereading T.E. Hulme

In a forward to the third German edition of *Abstraction and Empathy*, Worringer claims that 'the most recent movement in art has shown my problem to have gained an immediate topicality, not only for art-historians, whose concern is with the evaluation of the past, but also for practising artists striving after new goals of expression'.⁵⁵ Thus it is that T.E. Hulme, following Worringer, rejects materialist explanations of artistic form arguing, for example, 'that the use of mechanical lines in the new art is in no sense merely a reflection of mechanical environment. It is a result of a change of sensibility which is, I think, the result of a change of attitude which will become increasingly obvious'.⁵⁶ Worringer's claim that the interpretation of artistic form could no longer depend upon an increasingly redundant faith in materialism and that 'all valuations made from our standpoint, from the point of view of our modern aesthetics, which passes judgement exclusively in the sense of the Antique or the Renaissance, are from a higher standpoint absurdities and platitudes',⁵⁷ is given by Hulme as theoretical justification of the belief that the 'Renaissance attitude' is breaking up. Worringer had, after all, proclaimed that 'the need for empathy can be looked upon as a pre-supposition of artistic volition only where this artistic volition inclines toward the truths of organic life, that is toward naturalism in the higher sense' (p.14). For Hulme, contemporary art was to be unremittingly abstract: in its repudiation of organic and natural form, indeed of all psychological and sensual experience, it was to represent a primitive and fundamental desire to affirm some absolute value alien to a world which had been subjected to a tradition of subjective interpretation now in a process of collapse.

But although Hulme correctly interprets one conception of abstraction – that which Worringer conceives as being beyond all possibility of rehumanization, he entirely neglects the dialectical basis of the Northern artistic volition: that psychological disposition within whose scope Worringer includes his own endeavours. Worringer warns of the dismal consequences involved in any appraisal of history and its forms from a singular position of epistemological resignation:

Here are the two poles between which the whole drama of spiritual evolution is enacted, a drama that seems great to us only so long as we do not watch it from these poles. For then the whole history of spiritual cognition and mastery of the world looks like a fruitless expenditure of energy, a senseless gyration. Then we succumb to the bitter compulsion to examine the other side of the process, which shows us how every advance of the spirit has rendered our picture of the world more superficial and more shallow, how it had to be paid for at each step by the degeneration of man's innate organ for the unfathomableness of things. It is immaterial whether we transport ourselves back to the starting-point, or set ourselves down at the end-point, which for us is Kant – from both points our European-Classical culture appears in the same highly questionable light. (p.130)

T.E. Hulme was one thinker who suffered just such a bitter compulsion. Worringer had, in fact, claimed that empathy would 'only assume the shape of a comprehensive aesthetic system when it has united with the lines that lead from the opposite pole' (p.4), not that abstraction was to serve as the singular paradigm for all epistemological and art-historical models. Worringer's thought, although inclining towards formalism in its reaction to the naturalistic prejudices of the predominating tradition of art criticism, was not ordered solely towards the theory of abstraction with its equivalently monotheistic and transcendent world view. It involved in equal measure, and by necessity, the subjective theories of empathy which have been described.

T.E. Hulme's reading of Worringer and Bergson was directed towards a particular end. He aimed to substantiate his claims for a new geometric art and 'classical' verse with reference to modern aesthetics. The nature of his reading, however, with its assertions of one particular truth above its dialectical counterpart in the case of Worringer, and the procrustean use of Bergson's philosophy, results in several contradictions. These have not been missed by subsequent commentators, although often these critics are at a loss to explain the precise reasons for this, labouring as they are under those very Modernist misinformations Hulme's various interpretations were ordered to effect. Frank Kermode identifies anomalies in Hulme's thought but offers no real solution. He claims that whilst Hulme attacked the Romantic position he did not see

how dependent he was upon the tradition he was attacking, despite his avowed and enormous debt to Bergson. In so far as he was merely doing propaganda for a new abstract art which had already got under way he was primarily a reporter of Worringer, and that is consistent and defensible as far as it goes, which is not so far as the main historical generalisation; but in so far as he was introducing a new 'classical' poetry – anti-humanist poetry he means, which is a pretty paradox in

itself – his position is complex and unsatisfactory, because he has not found out what it really is.⁵⁸

Kermode is correct to identify Hulme's paradoxical relations with Bergsonian thought; Hulme, as we have seen, appropriates Bergson's critique of scientific materialism and rationalism just as far as he needs before founding his religious assertions upon the indescribable flux remaining. As Alun Jones claimed shortly after Kermode:

While Hulme is using Bergsonian metaphysics to circumvent nineteenth-century scientific materialism and to re-establish the efficacy of the religious and literary attitudes towards the world, he is also supporting, and indeed re-constituting, what is essentially a Romantic position. Hulme's whole-hearted rejection of Romanticism in all its manifestations is undoubtedly at odds with his enthusiasm for Bergson; his acceptance of Bergsonian metaphysics appears to be temperamentally as well as philosophically, incompatible with his insistence on the value of order, authority and the discipline of tradition.⁵⁹

Thus, as far as Jones is concerned, Hulme's 'enthusiasm for Bergson is more an indication of his intense hatred for scientific determinism than a measure of his agreement with Bergsonian metaphysics' (p.66).

What Kermode and Alun Jones respond to here can be more tangibly illustrated. Hulme supports philosophically incompatible views within the compass of one work. This may be attributed to the fact that Hulme is engaged upon an attempt to force truths from theories which were not designed to substantiate his own specific thesis. His adherence to certain Bergsonian propositions contradicts the final purpose which he has in mind for them, namely the need to recognize absolute values. Therefore initially he can say:

The *absolute* is to be described not as perfect, but if existent as essentially imperfect, chaotic and cinder-like. (Even this view is not ultimate, but merely designed to satisfy temporary human analogies and wants.)

World is indescribable, that is, not reducible to counters; and particularly it is impossible to include it all under one large counter such as 'God' or 'Truth' and the other verbalisms, or the disease of the symbolic language.⁶⁰

According to this, the absolute exist only to 'satisfy temporary human analogies and wants'. Just as in Vernon Lee's thesis, the idea of God is not one which is alien to the

human organism but is one which is constructed in relation to the personal and existential desires of the subject. Hulme here adopts a highly subjective position which puts him in line with the thought of Bergson and the empathy theorists: the world is measured in terms of human life and action and to posit an external absolute is an impossibility, for 'the absolute is invented to reconcile conflicting purposes. But these purposes are necessarily conflicting, even in the nature of Truth itself. It is so absurd to construct an absolute which shall at each moment just manage by artificial gymnastics to reconcile these purposes' (p.228).

So speaks the theorist who, with his proclamation of life as dynamic flux, has shed the cut and dry scientific determinism of the 'Truth' seeker, but who has also, apparently, dismissed the absolutist option of religious speculation. It is a statement which reminds us of the basic psycho-somatic empathy of Vernon Lee, removed even from the more abstract ideas of Lipps and certainly not tending towards the perilous realms of Will-to-Believe Pragmatism. This is the speech of one realizing 'that all our analogies spiritual and intellectual are derived from purely physical acts. Nay more, all attributes of the absolute and the abstract are really nothing more (in so far as they mean anything) but elaborations of simple passions. All poetry is an affair of the body – that is, to be real it must affect body' (p.242).

From our earlier analysis of Hulme's views the discordance of these statements must be recognized. It is tempting to believe that such anomalies are recognized by Hulme, that his propositions are lopsided in an owned fashion; certainly the above quotation seems stylistically, with its hint of archaism, to be a glance at Vernon Lee's philosophical persuasions. It certainly cannot be without a degree of irony that the theorist who scrupulously divided his picture of the world into three separate regions is able to say within the space of the same binding that 'I am immediately up in arms if a book says a subject can be divided into three separate parts' (p.224). Again, this is the same theorist who, whilst protesting that 'there is no end at all except in our own constructions' (p.243), had himself repudiated all anthropomorphism; who in his approach to philosophy had eschewed nominalism and claimed the benefits of disciplines which could 'purify' the world of its anthropomorphic assumptions:

All these subjects [logic and ethics] are thus placed on an entirely objective basis, and do not in the least depend on the human mind. The entities which form the subject-matter of these sciences are neither physical nor mental, they 'subsist.' They are dealt with by an investigation that is *not* empirical. Statements can be made about them whose truth does not depend on experience. When the empirical prejudice has been got rid of, it becomes possible to think of

certain 'higher' concepts, those of the good, of love, etc., as, at the same time, *simple*, and not necessarily to be analysed into more *elementary* (generally sensual) elements. (p.45)

Returning to Frank Kermode; whereas he certainly points us in the right direction so far as Bergson is concerned, it cannot be agreed that Hulme's propaganda for a new abstract art was simply a consistent and defensible reportage of Worringer's ideas. The very fact that Kermode notices a difference in the semantic sense attributed by these two theorists to the word 'classical' should be enough to suggest a need to discriminate between two differing registers of thought: Hulme's sense of 'classicism' equates with Worringer's descriptions of abstraction; Worringer's Classicism is associated with the organic and vital form anathema to Hulme. Alun Jones is more accurate than Kermode in claiming that:

The chief difference between Worringer and Hulme's abstraction of Worringer is that whereas Worringer is writing with the theories of Lipps, Volkelt and Riegl in mind and is relying on and modifying the work of contemporary writers on aesthetics, Hulme's purpose is largely to justify the work of modern artists, such as Epstein, whose work he associates with the Ravenna mosaics as a product of the urge to abstraction. (p.109)

In other words, Worringer's theories are not ranged against the subjective premise of neo-Kantian empathy theory but are formulated in dialectical accordance with that very basis; in no way is Worringer a reactionary polemicist providing Hulme with a ready-made propaganda machine ordered against subjectivist aesthetics. Reading Worringer through T.E. Hulme in an unquestioning fashion alienates the critic from a true understanding of the fundamental aesthetic of Modernism and denies a compulsion to reconsider the orientation of British Modernist theory.

The main difficulty seems to be this: Hulme wants to maintain that there are intrinsic values, which are good in themselves and do not need to be justified by any reward or good results. At the same time, he recognizes that no region of reality is completely detachable from the rest: 'Nothing is what it is, alone.' But to speak of 'intrinsic' values is to postulate just that kind of isolation; and therefore the second belief contradicts the first.⁶¹

So Michael Roberts, one of Hulme's earlier commentators, sums up the central anomaly. Hulme maintains that things can subsist in themselves with an absolute justification which has no need of any relation to practical experience. In aesthetic

terms that means that the work of art need bear no relation to the personality of its creator or its temporal context, its justification is to be sought in the realms of theological abstraction. But in opposition to this view Hulme recognizes, deliberately or not, that there is some sort of correspondence between the realms of spirit and the corporeal world, that form may be a construct of human desires and passions. On the one hand there is an austere monotheistic transcendentalism serving the aesthetic impulse; yet on the other there is the basis of a Romantic and pantheistic humanism. This tortuous vacillation can only be explained by the fact that Hulme builds his propaganda upon the foundations of neo-Kantian and neo-Hegelian aesthetics and is unable to disentangle himself entirely from their dialectical and synthetic implications.

Ezra Pound wrote in 1939 that, contrary to popular opinion, T.E. Hulme, although indeed influential – especially in his posthumously published work which gave guidance to ‘Messrs. Lewis and Eliot’ in the ‘bleak and smeary “Twenties”’⁶² – ‘had no monopoly of London literary life’ (p.15) in the years immediately prior to the First World War. This ambiguous appraisal of Hulme’s import begins to make sense when Pound lets slip his own justification for qualifying the amount of influence he amongst others had credited to Hulme: ‘His evenings were diluted with crap like Bergson’ (p.15), states Pound, obviously uneasy with such Romantic affiliations.

2.10 J.F. Hendry: ‘Hulme as Horatio’

Perhaps the most astute and significant critique of Hulme’s less than scrupulous reading of psychological aesthetics is offered to us by the Scottish writer and theorist J.F. Hendry. Hendry considered himself to belong to a group of theorists who were self-consciously devoted to the pursuit of an aesthetic tradition which was not defined in terms of a Modernist ethos prescribed by Hulme, affected by Eliot and incorporated by the ‘Auden Generation’. His vision of a new ‘Apocalyptic’ poetry was a vision which sought to retrieve the Romantic subjectivism which had been edited from literary and art-history by centralist Modernist dogma. His intention was to assert the importance to poetic sensibility of the intuition or empathy, to recover the idea of a communication between the realms of spirit and matter that Hulme had obfuscated with his definitions of a purist abstraction removed from all organic contingencies. Hendry writes a eulogy for the perfect humanism that early Modernism might have been, giving validation to the case that the thought of Worringer received increasing attention by a second generation of artists who believed a fair translation of his ideas into the

Modernist discourse was better late than never: in short, he set out to prove that there was more indeed in heaven and earth than had been supposed in Hulme's philosophy.

Hendry's article, 'Hulme as Horatio' was published in 1942. His premise, as he makes clear, was to provide a critique of early Modernist ideas in order 'to gain some conception of wherewe are going':

The first thing to note is that Hulme's vision of reality is closely akin to T.S. Eliot's image of 'The Waste Land'. The common quality seems to be their belief that reality is brittle, possibly even breaking up, and more than that, their interpretation of this 'reality' in terms which are always wholly material and inorganic, 'broken glass in a dry cellar'. Thus their historical significance seems to lie in the fact that in them, as individuals, a 'scientific-materialist' outlook on the world is coming to an end, if indeed it is not already dead. Their imagery implies a whole superstructure of philosophy and experience known to be outmoded. Both therefore sought something to replace the excessively objective outlook which was in process of collapse. Mr. Eliot embraced the Anglican faith. Hulme thought he had found his panacea in a philosophy, the core of which, perhaps, was Bergson's conception of intuition.⁶³

Hulme and Eliot, having lost faith in the ability of the practical intellect to explain the world with scientific surety, both seek alternative certainties. Hendry notes, however, that 'while Hulme rejects the nineteenth-century concept of the inevitability of progress, he still retained the nineteenth-century concept of the intrinsic value of the material world' (p.138). In other words, Hulme rejects scientific materialism as an inadequate system whose proclaimed objectivity can never explain man's relations to the world, but goes on to replace it with another type of materialism which does not justify the existence of matter in terms of science but in terms of a transcendent theological proposition: 'His search for a new classicism and ethereal absolute is the counterpart of Mr. T.S. Eliot's conversion, and its error consists in its assumption that man must be deserted for the abstract, because of the failure of an abstraction' (p.138).

Hulme is unwilling to draw a compromise between the humanism which he regards as a mechanized abstraction shown to be fallacious by modern critiques of scientific or materialist interpretations of the world, and the non-sensuous, non-empirical absolute he offers as an alternative, though incommunicable, explanation of reality. Consequently, man lives in a material world the understanding of which is denied him, knowing that its ultimate justification is given from a position to which he has no cognitive bridge: 'No bridge, no communication between spirit and matter was permitted or recognized. Thus Hulme strangled his own intuition at birth. The images

that did come forth from it were, like those of Rimbaud, images of dissociation, of disintegration, cinders. What might have been the foundation of a new and absolute Humanism, becomes the definition of an ancient and inverted materialism' (p.139).

Hulme's theories might have provided the foundation of a new, modern humanism had he allowed a bridge between the abstract realm of spirit and the sensuous world of matter, pure reason and empiricism; had he, in fact, appropriated fully and properly the Germanic axioms his thesis drew so heavily from. Hendry notes, as I have noted, that this dialectic can never be entirely suppressed and that 'in practice, whatever Hulme may assert, it seems that at various times myths serve as a bridge, and the Christian myth in fact did so in Hulme's case, whether he recognized it or not' (p.139). The philosophy of Hegel, so influential to Worringer and thus implicitly to Hulme, was founded upon the notion that spirit was presented in the world of matter through the Christian idea of the incarnation: Gothic art was the greatest celebration of such immanence. Hendry, aware of Hulme's debt to such thinking, suggests that his subject cannot maintain such a rigorously transcendental philosophical position without running the risk of substantial contradiction. Hulme postulates an absolute separation between man and God yet, notes Hendry,

somehow man is to be ruled by the Deity. There's the rub, for if the Deity is out of touch with man, yet must rule man, He can surely do it only through a representative, and we are back at the Divine Right of Kings, where the Divine right is in question since there is no bridge! Without the concept of myth we are lost, and the myth of humanism is as valid as the myth of Divine Right. Even Hulme asserts that all men are equal. (p.140)

To Hendry myth 'is the dynamic of progression – not the old easy "progress" – active intuition, not Hulme's static surrender of that intuition to external forces' (p.142). Myth is a principle dissociated from the purely sceptical notions of historical continuity and progression eschewed by Hulme, but neither is it the supposition of abstract universals: myth is precisely the Hegelian idea of a synthetic exchange between realms of abstraction and the 'natural' realms preconditioning the idea of empathy and which was postulated by Worringer as the defining psychological volition of Gothic man. The idea of myth, and particularly myth in relation to an archetypal notion of Gothicism saturates thought of the late 1930s and 1940s. Hendry's essay itself exemplifies perfectly a general attempt to relocate the emphasis of Modernism, providing as he does so an important extra-aesthetic consideration. For, as he says of Hulme's aesthetic:

Never is there a word of human attempt at self-expression through a new set of human relations. We are simply invited to exchange human exploitation in the interests of a materialist absolute, for human exploitation in the interests of mechanist idealism. And this in spite of Hulme's professed belief that 'there is no average or real truth to be discovered among the different fronts of prejudice'. No attempt is made to incorporate even this last important concept in any new political order. That might mean delegation of responsibility, or a new social myth of democracy, but Hulme denies bridges. He is a very poor Horatio, especially for these days when the Channel is a very real bridge with an Infinite Darkness. (p.141)

As Henry Treece notes 'Munich and the Fall of France were aesthetic no less than political events'.⁶⁴ The second half of Hendry's article submits Hulme's definitions of a new geometrical art to close scrutiny. This appraisal identifies the polarized nature of Hulme's propositions and illustrates once again the limited nature of Hulme's appropriation of Worringer's thesis, for 'in his actual consideration of the geometrical nature of Egyptian arts, he was too content perhaps to take these for granted as isolated phenomena, ignoring the other side of the picture' (p.143). We may say that 'the other side of the picture' is that side which stresses the importance of an anthropological and psychological measurement of artistic form, a reading of form which takes into account the idea of empathy. Hendry affirms, in line with Worringer, the notion that a tendency to abstraction – even though it seeks alienation from contingent subjectivity – results from an inner psychological condition, is itself motivated according to subjective criteria. Hulme had written of abstraction as though it bore no relation to this inner condition, as though abstract form could not be taken up by the tendency to empathy – a process that forms the very core of Worringer's thesis. For Hendry, on the other hand, geometrical art was

less a reaction to external flux than the expression of *inner* instability, just as our own institutions and cultivation of the reason are forms of inhibition, repression, or objectifications of inner conflicts. That our art is more vital than Egyptian or Byzantine therefore, may be due to the fact that we are more aware of the real nature of the conflict than were these primitive peoples, and hence better able to express it in vital terms. Our myths have more individual and social content. Only when they prove deficient in this, will a 'geometric' art become likely. It is noteworthy that in Hulme the myth has become very non-human indeed. (p.144)

Hendry maintains that the tendency to abstraction is simply a projection or objectification of an interior condition rather than a desire to escape from the realms of experience through the assertion of an external and non-human absolute. Our reason cannot hope to search for a pure *a priori* knowledge, but must rest content with the elaboration of our subjective condition. This equates with the positivistic suggestion put by Vernon Lee that the only teleology of which we may be sure is a human one – that our minds must remain, as Kant demonstrated, bounded within their own ‘organic intellectual necessities’ – and allows Hendry to further argue that

there is therefore less difference between the arts leading up to the Classical period, and our Renaissance and modern art, than Hulme supposed, since its vital nature is merely a consequence of recognition that the conflict is in reality an inner one, and incapable of *solution* in external, geometrical, non-human terms.

Again though the work of Epstein is continually cited in support of his thesis, it is overlooked that in addition to the geometrical, ‘cubism’ in Picasso, Cézanne, or Epstein, there is present a great deal of irrationality and myth. (pp.144-145)⁶⁵

Hendry claims that ‘the intuition which Hulme neglected, can be seen therefore to be of extreme psychological importance’ (p.146). This ‘intuition’ may be directly related to the idea of empathy which in Worringer’s particular conception is able to create a bridge between the realm of life and of abstraction. Hendry continues his identification of Hulme’s fallibility:

The error lies again in excessively objective thinking which allows no place to man, the psychological twist which sees ‘reality’ in a heap of stones, but none in a crowd. The need is therefore now for a philosophy which shall include psychology, instead of roping it off, and by integrating man, do something to integrate his society, from the individual upwards into institutions. For that, we shall need a Horatio with belief in the bridge, for to disbelieve in it now is the essence of psychological Fifth-Columnism. (pp.146-147)

Hendry was attempting to re-describe the locus of British Modernism which he considered to have been typically defined by the thought of Hulme and the early poetry and criticism of T.S. Eliot. In order to do this the artist needed to discover a new social responsibility; this was to be achieved by a philosophical reclamation of psychology and the reconstruction of individualism as a necessary alternative to an alienating eschatology which was no longer regarded serviceable. This attitude came to

characterize the aesthetic inclinations of artists, poets and theorists attempting to develop the earlier systems of Modernist thought which they had inherited. It was a movement away from the religious asceticism and speculative ideologies of the early Modernists and towards a new humanism.

The theoretical basis of this dynamic movement was founded upon a system of historical analogy, with T.E. Hulme launching invective against the 'Renaissance attitude' and lending support to ideal conceptions of a religious transcendentalism which might discover its epochal location in an austere primitivism or rigorous medievalism. It is my contention that succeeding theorists wished to base their aesthetic principles upon conceptions of a Christian humanism which sought to describe a synthesis of early religious inclinations and an increasingly powerful feeling of empathy for the sensual world: to move away from the restrictions of pure abstraction towards a new renaissance of form which incorporated elements of the formal and the organic in one mode of expression. For, as Worringer had sought to make clear, 'the true psychology of style begins when the formal value is shown to be the accurate expression of the inner value, in such a way that duality of form and content ceases to exist'.⁶⁶

2.11 Benedetto Croce

In this context the thought of the Italian Philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) is of significant importance. His aesthetic principles provide the grounds for a criticism of the tendency towards pure abstraction in modern art and literature, and the position he champions is one which favours a definition of art centred around the notion of the intuition: art and poetry as the elaboration and expression of human passions and emotions rather than an externalized justification of theological abstractions. More importantly still, his definitions are founded upon the same historicist idealism appropriated by Hulme and Worringer, with the Renaissance becoming for him the privileged epoch. It is not surprising, then, that T.E. Hulme levels invective against him in his *Speculations*. Hulme considers the nature of the philosophical tradition since the Renaissance as one which formulates a conception of man according to unthinkingly progressive criteria and includes Croce in his repudiation of such assumptive categories:

It should be noticed that these canons of *satisfaction* are quite unconscious. The philosophers share a view of what would be a *satisfying* destiny for man, which they take over from the Renaissance. They are all satisfied with certain conceptions of the relation of man to the world. These *conclusions* are never questioned in this respect. Their truth may be questioned, but never their *satisfactoriness*. This ought to be questioned. This is what I mean by a *critique of satisfaction*. When Croce, for example, finishes up with the final world-picture of the 'legitimate' *mystery of infinite progress and the infinite perfectibility of man* – I at once want to point out that not only is this not true, but, what is even more important, if true, such a shallow conception would be quite unworthy of the emotion he feels towards it. (pp.16-17)

Croce's aesthetic system self-consciously cultivates the 'Renaissance attitude' so vociferously attacked by Hulme. Croce, writing in 1931, claimed that 'a feature which plainly distinguishes modern from medieval times is the renewal in the former of a vigorous political and economic life and of all forms of art'.⁶⁷ The inception of this modern age is defined by Croce as the Renaissance and its two concomitant sciences are appraised by the philosopher in the following way:

So the two eminently modern sciences, aesthetics and economics, tend to reconcile the flesh and the spirit. They free the spirit from the incubus of an external nature, and spiritualise the subject's object; they shew [sic] that the conflict of good and evil is in ourselves, and thus complete the philosophy of immanence by rejecting every kind of transcendence. Thus they are the eminently profane sciences. It will not be surprising that one who has long cultivated them and gained great enlightenment from them for his spiritual life, should wish in his old age to offer them this humble tribute. (p.152)

Croce regards aesthetics, to which the Renaissance gave birth, as a means by which the dualism between the realms of objective externals and inner subjectivity is resolved. It was precisely this philosophy of continuity between man and world for which Hulme had proposed disruption. Croce affirms the very doctrine of immanence Hulme sought with such fervour to explode, doing so with pointed reference to the epochal archetypes arraigned by Hulme and other Modernists of a similarly ascetic disposition. Croce's definitions are formulated with a powerfully antithetical regard for the philosophies of religious reaction which he identifies down the ages; it is certain that he included himself in the tradition of counter-reaction proceeding such periods of asceticism:

It would be particularly interesting to record the reactions which were again and again stimulated by every persistence or revival of the medieval opposition to these two sciences, and by every reappearance of a hostility between the flesh and the spirit, even when its motives or its forms were those of modern thought. Among these reactions were the polemic of Vico on behalf of the historical consciousness as against Cartesian rationalism, that of Galileo against Aristotelianism, the protest of Schiller against rigoristic and ascetic vestiges in the Kantian ethics, the rebellion of romantic aesthetics against a frigid classicism, the criticism by expressionists of the aesthetics of the universal conception, even when it was subtilised as the 'Idea', and so on. The constant motive of philosophies born again from life, experience and poetry was reaction against the lifeless, academic philosophy of the schools, which is usually confined to a world devoid of passion and imagination and tends to abstract logic and pedantic ethics. (p.145)

Hulme falls neatly into the category defined for a certain theorist who utilizes modern systems of thought in order to assert the desirability of restoring an age-old duality. Croce's philosophy which is, conversely, very much concerned with the Romantic fusion of life, experience and poetry, may be considered as an attempt to provide a panacea to the abstract logic and pedantic ethics of a theorist such as Hulme who had seen the value of verse not as lyrical intuition but who had claimed that 'it is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things'.⁶⁸

Croce's privileging of a Renaissance ideal in order to ascertain the nature and function of modern aesthetics deserves closer attention; for here economics and aesthetics 'are trying by definition and systematization to give theoretical justification, as a creative spiritual activity, to what used to be called "the senses", something distrusted and feared or even rejected and exorcised by the Middle Ages, but reinstated by the practical activities of the modern world'.⁶⁹ These two sciences, with their sensual emphasis, intend the establishment of an intuitive faculty of mind which does not operate on a purely 'logical' or 'ratiocinative' basis; likewise they allow human relations to the world which are not prescribed according to ethical and legalistic strictures but according to affective subjective principles: they are causal factors, mentally and practically, in the elaboration of experience according to human needs and desires, and which replace a preceding tradition of rigorous anti-humanism: 'And this was in fact a "resurrection of the body", as the phrase goes, a justification of mere life as such, of human affections in every shape' (p.144).

This is familiar territory and is reminiscent of empathy theory, with its notion of an inner volition, or quest of spirit, living itself out in the external world and perceiving

that world as an analogy of its own inner experience. Moreover, Worringer associated this tendency with periods of naturalism and humanism such as were exemplified during the Renaissance, the psychology of which was coveted by Croce. The Hegelian provenance of these ideas becomes clearer still as Croce continues his descriptions of the relationship between sense and spirit.

No doubt this justification of 'the senses' could not be achieved without at the same time spiritualising them. From something external and hostile to spirit, fearful enemies, bestial and full of guile, to be resisted implacably to the death, they were transformed into something within the realm of spirit, into a kind of spirituality with a character, function and worth of its own and necessary, therefore, to a complete and wholesome spiritual life. But if sense was spiritualised by this adoption and elevation, spirit was sensualised, or rather recovered its harmonious integrity, and no longer suffered the former mutilation of organs essential to its life and activity. Logic and ethics came down from heaven to earth; scholastic formal logic was replaced by observation, experiment and induction; morality, instead of an external legislation, became the 'moral sense' or conscience, no longer the enemy of the passions and of happiness, but their indulgent though critical friend. No longer were the passions to be expelled from man's heart, but were to be elevated and purified so as to contribute energy to his life and action. (p.144)

Purely sensual experience is removed from its corporeality and lifted up into the realms of the spirit and made adequate to it. But this transfiguration is not of an absolute kind; spirit, although it has withdrawn from the external world and has defined itself with reference to its own inner essence does not resolve itself into a state of pure abstraction but enters into a dialectical exchange with the sensual. Therefore, spirit is bound neither to a decadent and hedonistic existence in the realm of sense alone, nor is it confined to a lifeless, transcendent and incommunicable plane of being. Croce makes the same claims for his Renaissance reconciliation of spirit and matter made by Worringer with his definitions of an 'ideal reconciliation' at the apotheosis of Gothic:

The certainty of being able to see God in oneself leads to a springtime of the soul, and this springtime reacts on the whole world of existence, which is reflected in the soul. It is a refined, subtle anthropomorphism, an anthropomorphism become spiritual, which here expresses itself. As in this case it is not the clear senses in which the world of existence is mirrored but the soul, that super-sensuous element, this process of sensualization of the world of existence initiated by mysticism is not of such a clear, sensuous nature of that of Antiquity and of the Renaissance: it would in this case be more accurate to speak of a process of spiritualization than of a process of sensualization. But in the close connexion between sensuous and spiritual feeling, it is clear that

none the less this new, mystical feeling formed a connecting link with that refined, sensuous feeling which was established by the Renaissance as the European ideal.⁷⁰

In each case the general idea owes much to the Hegelian definition of the Romantic aesthetic volition which has as its central metaphor the idea of the incarnation. In the introduction to his translation of Croce's work *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, Douglas Ainslie claims that 'when with Croce's help we have scraped the lichen of his formulae from the thought of Hegel, we find beneath it the true philosopher, the hater of all that is abstract and motionless, of the should-be that never is, of the ideal that is not real'.⁷¹ The approximation of certain contemporary modes of thought to this Hegelian notion of the 'eternal in the temporal and the temporal in the eternal', along with a reading of Hegel stressing in particular the idea of immanence and reality, suggests why the theories of Worringer and Croce might be so serviceable to a theorist such as Hendry seeking a bridge between abstract divinity and the human condition. Croce's definitions of the poetic intuition are suggestive of this same bridge for 'without these two sciences [aesthetics and economics] the immanent metaphysic of reality could never have been rounded off'.⁷² Worringer too, in *Form and Gothic*, describes a process whereby 'the principle of divine transcendence gradually sinks into the conception of divine immanence' (p.175).

Croce defines the nature of art in his influential *Guide to Aesthetics* of 1913. Art is intuition and

what lends coherence and unity to intuition is intense feeling. Intuition is truly such because it expresses an intense feeling, and can arise only when the latter is its source and basis. Not idea but intense feeling is what confers upon art the ethereal lightness of the symbol. Art is precisely a yearning kept within the bounds of a representation. In art the yearning [for expression] is there solely for the sake of the representation, and representation solely for the sake of the yearning. Epic and lyric, or drama and lyric, are scholastic divisions of the indivisible. Art is always lyrical, or, if you like, the epic and drama of feeling.⁷³

Art is intuitive and not theological, conceptual or related to mundane practical necessity; it has a relation to emotional experience and 'is not immediately utilitarian and hedonistic, operating as it does on a higher spiritual plane' (p.12). Remembering rudimentary definitions of empathy, art represents the freedom with which the mind lives itself out in matter or, in Croce's words, 'what we admire in genuine works of art is the perfect imaginative form that a state of mind assumes there; and this is called the

life, unity, compactness, and fullness of the work of art' (p.25). For this reason Croce's reaction against certain developments in modern art is made clear:

According to contemporaries who preach and describe what they call the new art and poetry, it is the first that ever has appeared in the world. All that has hitherto usurped the name being mere 'literature'. The inanity of their theory and practice is exhibited by the currency in their jargon of the term 'abstract art', for art is nothing if not concrete and never excludes or abstracts from the expression of feelings, since poetry is simply giving to these feelings the poetic tone which endows them with ideal rhythm. They have also a fondness for the word 'hermetic'; but art is lucidity not obscurity, it does not even play at obscurity, for it is serious.⁷⁴

Croce repudiates any notion that art has as its defining principle an objective quality independent of human feeling: the essence of art is its lyricism, its relation to the creative personality of its author. Art is not configured according to some unknown quantity and its beauty cannot be attributed to any external cause, for, according to Croce, 'beauty has often been judged indefinable and mysterious, but on the contrary, it can be and is understood as having the origin which we have ascribed to it; and this origin demands that we should attribute to beauty the cognitive element of pure intuition' (p.138). There can be no supposition of ineffable transcendent absolutes in order to explain aesthetic response or artistic creation, for it is the task of the modern philosopher to

reveal the object of thought as nothing but those passions, motives, impulses, those pleasures and pains, those infinitely various emotions which are the direct objects of intuition and imagination, and indirectly therefore of reflection and thought. On this principle truth must no longer be defined, as in scholastic philosophy, as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* since the *res* has been eliminated, but rather (so long as we take the idea of 'adequacy' metaphysically) as *adaequatio praxeos et intellectus*, a 'correspondence' between action and thought. (p.149)

Thought is included within human action and motive and cannot posit objective truths external to the human organism. Human will and nature are not separated from spirit but implicit in it; thought and imagination also 'must embody themselves in it, realising themselves in words and other symbols, and by this self-realisation becoming liable to all the vicissitudes of passion and to the contrasts of pain and pleasure' (p.150). So it is with the work of art which cannot exist abstractly but must always bear relation to these human exigencies: 'The independence of a form presupposes the material with

which it works, as we have already seen in elaborating upon the genesis of art as the intuitive organization of an emotional or passional material. Now, under a condition of absolute independence without any material to feed on, form itself, being empty, would nullify itself.'⁷⁵ Form and content are not to be conceived of as separate artistic qualities but as one and the same, it being understood that 'content is given form and form is given content, that feeling is a feeling which is formed, and form is a form which is felt' (p.31).

Croce's investigations seek their synthetic place between the swings of a polarized discourse which either 'separates content from form – usually called psychological – and which, instead of paying attention to the works of art, pays attention to the psychology of the artists as men' (p.75), or 'abstracts forms from content and is delighted with abstract forms because, depending on individual cases and sympathies, they remind it of antiquity or of the Middle Ages' (p.75). Croce's attempt to encompass both these aspects within one cohesive aesthetic recalls Worringer's preoccupations with the way in which a tradition of psychological aesthetics might correspond with a more scholastic tradition, the whole given metaphorical elaboration with reference to the apotheosis of the Gothic volition as an ideal moment fusing the asceticism of Medievalism with the anthropomorphic bravado of the Renaissance.

2.12 The New Apocalypse

The aesthetic direction taken by the New Apocalypse writers of the early 1940s has a close affinity with Croce's conceptions of proper creative endeavour. We have seen Croce's equivalence of thought, imagination and human action, whereby the objects of thought are no longer considered external to the human condition but are encompassed by it and reach out from it, elaborations of the emotional material of life. J.F. Hendry, a leading exponent of the movement, co-editor of its three anthologies, and possibly its most searching theorist, proclaimed that 'the technical problem of how to write organically is to-day almost one with the human problem of how to act organically, if we accept action as the social expression and fulfilment of a whole personality. This is true, or is becoming true, not because thinking is action, nor because writing is action, but because both are aspects of living – which is the central problem'.⁷⁶ The New Apocalypse is heralded by Hendry as a movement in search of conditions in which 'absolute norms break down and man stands forth as the ultimate reality to be reckoned with on earth' (p.9), in which the only proper teleological concern consists of the

projection of self into the external world. To this effect Hendry quotes from Dunne's *The New Immortality* :

'This self which you cannot visualise mentally, but about which your attention is focussed so persistently and so alertly, is not a thing at all. It is a travelling intersection point...There is no evidence that this field, which is remember your psychological 'field of presentation,' extends physically outside your brain into space...From what you observe you *infer* space beyond and you put that space into the map you draw of the world. But other observers may disagree with that map of yours.'

This is an excellent analysis of myth, showing as it does that myth is the projection of the self – which is not an object! – into the world at large, the creative instinct working on matter. Each man in other words has his own space, his own orientation, which must be encouraged or adapted if we are to attain the whole man we are seeking. (p.11)

In the creative act the self is not externalized and abstracted, resolved into an impersonal objectivity, but corresponds with matter, is a 'travelling intersection point', a bridge between the world of the inorganic and the organic; therefore 'Apocalyptic writing notes the ever more pitiless war waged between these two; the war for justice to man, to prevent his becoming an object as in abstract art or the Totalitarian state; the war, not against the object, since it is hopeless ever to try to free man from matter, but to attain the optimum living fusion between man and total environment' (p.11).

Hendry reacts against the telegraphic and propagandist treatment of those dialectical sources whereby an objective mythology is constructed – mechanical or transcendental – which precludes the reality of personality or the importance of the individual. His attack is levelled against abstraction of any kind, whether that be the 'mechanistic materialism' (p.12) of Allot and Auden or the religious principles of Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and early Gaudier-Brzeska. All these artists 'by attempting to break away from the object, or from the subject...have wrecked themselves and set up a powerful psychological pull in the opposite direction' (p.12). The writers and artists who are worthy of consideration, however, are those in whom the sensuousness of living experience does not suffer atrophy in the formal expression of the work of art:

Somewhere in 'Ulysses' Joyce speaks of the 'ineluctable modality of the visible.' It is the task of man, and of artists, more than ever to control and adapt that modality to his own. Joyce's delight in the word 'Leib' is important here, like the alliteration and sound effects to be found in the poems of Dylan Thomas, where they serve a definite organic purpose, the pleasure in recurrence

being a pleasure in wholeness and roundedness, the sound that brings to life the reality. This is the living 'breaking through,' the proof that the problem of writing and the problem of action are one and the same. (pp.13-14)

The fact that the tendency towards abstraction may embrace both that of a religious kind and a purely mechanical type is explained by Hendry in a second anthology of writing:

there is little difference, in point of behaviour, between the psychological approach to myth, as implied for example in religion when it talks of the necessity of faith, and the materialist approach to objects, the value of which must not only be unquestioned, but is often raised into a principle of faith also, into an ideology [sic], a form of worship which already shows signs of developing its own ritual, its own symbols and its own totems.⁷⁷

The psychological reception of inorganic matter or impersonal mechanism corresponds with a particular religious disposition ordered towards the repudiation of the organic: Hendry's critique of Hulme's inverted materialism has been seen with reference to this contention. For, as Vernon Lee has made clear and as Hendry affirms, 'there exists a tendency in the mind, which must be observed and studied, to erect principles of faith, or worship, or of religion, in the most surprising way' (p.158).

Hendry calls for a reintegration of the individual in society and the development of a social myth or will around the aspirations of its individual members, rather than the imposition on them of an objective pre-ordained structure. With respect to this he orders his social polemic against contemporary political systems: 'The fascist state erects a complete social myth, or illusion, to begin with. It does not base itself on the individual but suppresses his private myth with complete ruthlessness' (p.160). He continues: 'Real identification of the selves with one another could only come with self-expression; were the state, that is to say, actually the expression of its members, and not of a party caucus or group of interests, financial or otherwise' (p.162). Hendry introduces the subject of religion and the church:

The truth is that the older religious creed had an organic content which was overlaid by tradition, ritual and institutionalism. Christ was doubly crucified, once on the Cross and once by the Churches, once on wood and once in stone. That fascisms are worse neuroses than the religious 'illusions' is but to say that in abandoning religion, we have abandoned the only organic creed that is widely-known – instead of merely abolishing its social manifestations. It is but to say that

when the churches created institutions, with vested interests, instead of preaching the old, human revolutionary creed, they created the fascism they now complain about. (p.163)

The idea of Christianity as an 'organic creed' able to reconcile the humanity with an abstract ideal is vitiated by the development of socially constructed abstractions; the value of religion to the individual is supplanted by ideologies which pay no regard to individual myth content. Hendry argues a return to religious and political creeds in which personal revelation takes the place of dogmatic instruction. He perhaps takes his inspiration from Worringer who spoke of a process whereby the ritualistic and institutionalized attacks upon individuality by the hieratic codes of medieval church and state became ever less sustainable as a consciousness of personality was allowed to develop.

Crowd sensibility and abstract sensibility are indeed two words for the same thing. And it is equally tautological to say that, with the awakening of the individual consciousness, the abstractness of sensibility was relaxed and transformed into sensuousness. For the abstract is precisely the impersonal, the super-personal, and, as such, an expression of the undifferentiated crowd, while sensuous feeling is inseparably bound up with the process of the individualization of humanity, and can only be experienced by individual personalities. The man who has been set free from the crowd feels of necessity sensuously and naturally, because his detachment from the crowd proves precisely that dualism has to a certain extent vanished, and a certain feeling of unity between man and the outer world has set in. It is true that the crowd can feel sensuously, but only the crowd composed of individual personalities; not the crowd still individually undifferentiated which was the vehicle of feeling in the Middle Ages.⁷⁸

What Worringer identifies here, in the cultural psychology of the late Middle Ages as it developed towards the Renaissance, is precisely a growth in the humanistic principle of individuality called for by Hendry or, indeed, the Hegelian ideal of God in man envisaged by Croce. For the growth of individual consciousness was accompanied by a growth in mysticism and 'mysticism is nothing else than the belief in the divinity of the human soul' (p.175). We are reminded once again of the idea of empathy (or Croce's lyrical intuition) in which the world becomes a reflection of the human soul and God an elaboration of it. Thus, states Hendry, 'Christianity is a myth only because it is still a human aspiration, and not because it "is not true"'.⁷⁹ Hendry's wish to collapse the distinctions between man and a religious absolute is only part of a general desire to see 'the fusion of man and object in philosophy through the collapse of the subject-

object relation; the fusion of man and government through the collapse of totalitarianism and "state" as a superhuman concept; fusion of man and art, by bringing art to actual life'.⁸⁰

Worringer's thesis measures the discovery of personality with reference to a developing Northern tradition or volition. It must be more than purely coincidental, therefore, that reactions to the Modernist doctrine of impersonality locate themselves not in the extra-spatial dictates of cosmopolitan post-Impressionist theory, but in conceptions of an insular Northern will to form. According to Henry Treece 'the Apocalyptic tradition is British and not French, since it has its roots in Blake, in Webster, even in Revelations'.⁸¹ Exponents of Apocalypticism had, according to its artists and commentators, an affinity with older Celtic traditions which defied the comprehension of mainstream Modernist criticism:

It is not surprising that these English critics have failed to understand the movement. A tolerance for the idea of compound realities is essential, in which respect the Celtic imagination has always held the floor. The English, for instance, call the Welsh 'two-faced', a derogatory expression, but a bit nearer the truth than they imagine, for this double-facedness is a recognition of at least two modes of thought or action. To the Welshman, and to the Celt as a whole, there are at least two worlds; that of objects and that of dreams. The balanced man recognizes both; the *whole* man sees even more than that. He sees a world of action, one of thought, one of feeling and one of imagination; and moreover he sees each one of these splitting up into other, equally important worlds. (p.74)

So it is that Treece identifies Dylan Thomas and Gerard Manley Hopkins as profound influences on modern poetry. They demonstrate this Celtic facility to assimilate the two worlds which had undergone a separation in the art and thought of the Modernist tradition. Hopkins in particular was considered a poet who had been able to forge a human correspondence with abstract ideas, to reflect on external intellectual problems in terms of an inner anguish:

Gerard Manley Hopkins was a poet of conflict, of intensity and rebellion in a way, and to a degree, unapproached by any other poet of his period. His work shows a tension, a dissatisfaction with accepted formulae, yet a hope for the future, which our young poets, nurtured on *The Wasteland*, and already becoming reactionary to it, could most easily and most sincerely take as a model. The Depression, once stated, is barren and sterile; later comes a reaction, a renewed hope, and the tremendously vital work of Hopkins points the way to consummation. (p.130)

The artists and poets of whom Treece writes are those reacting to poets such as Eliot, Allot, Auden, and Lewis, claimed by Hendry to be 'advocating vociferously the "necessary murder," unaware that the Waste Land is only the Waste Land of the Object, unaware they are themselves now looking on men as objects, and preparing to slaughter them in a violence which is but the postponement of real action – the living synthesis of man and his world'.⁸² Such an identification could lead Treece to venture in 1946 that 'literary historians of the future may, at the least, attribute to the post-war and war-years a Romantic revival in Art which, if not in itself overwhelming, is symptomatic of possible artistic developments during the next decade or so'.⁸³ He continues:

Since, let us say, the middle thirties, an individualistic approach has become more and more apparent in Art, pictorial and literary. Take, for example, the pictures of Graham Sutherland and Mary Wykeham, the carving of Henry Moore, the poetry of W.R. Rodgers. Accepted surface forms and textures have suddenly been discarded, the skin has been cut back to show the organs beneath it. Everywhere progressive painters and writers have been concerned with interpreting life in terms of dark, fundamental impulses and subconscious motives. Almost everywhere the explosively chaotic nature of life has been recognized, explored and recorded. (p.173)

The New Apocalypse movement was one which proclaimed itself 'as a movement with a flexible philosophy, attracting many different kinds of writers'.⁸⁴ As such, an attempt to chart all its differences and to comment upon all the writers included within its scope would be a thankless task. It is enough to have established its general relation to that wider philosophical movement away from the aesthetics of abstraction and towards the reaffirmation of the idea of personality in relation to a particular Northern, and more particularly Celtic, Christian, mythology.

CHAPTER THREE

'NEARER TO THE GOTHIC SPIRIT': ROMANTIC ANNUNCIATIONS OF MODERNISM

3.1 Introduction

In 1927 Herbert Read's translation of *Form in Gothic* was published in Britain. Its influence was tremendous, although judging by the scant recognition afforded it by modern critics one would hardly think this to be the case. In this chapter I want to give an impression of the depth and breadth of that influence; to show how, from the earliest signs of a disenchantment with the excessive formalism of earlier Modernist practice and ideology, Worringer's notional Gothicism represents a pervasive literary, artistic and cultural metaphor.⁸⁵

Herbert Read's scholarly translation of Worringer was the first available to an English speaking audience and, as such, provided an opportunity to address again the aesthetic issues which, through philosophical manipulation, had provided T.E. Hulme with many of the ostensible principles and exemplary archetypes he required for the assertion of a new formalism in the arts. An increasing disaffection with the theories expounded by Hulme could be countered by retrieving from Worringer's work those anthropomorphic elements excluded from the half-truth transcriptions found in *Speculations*. Therefore, from the late 1920s British aesthetics concerned itself with a restoration of the dialectical complexities of Worringer's thought, with a reconstruction of its psychological tenets and a resurrection of its subjective implications. In 1933 Herbert Read wrote that

fundamental to all exact psychology of the creative process is the notion that art is the expression through the senses of states of intuition, perception or emotion, peculiar to the individual. Nowhere, in the modern psychology of art, will you find any justification for the notion that art is a perceptual or intellectual activity concerned with the formulation of absolute or ideal types. That art has been and still is occupied with human and spiritual values, the psychologist is willing to admit; but these have nothing to do with the nature of the aesthetic process itself. They are questions of value – values in ethics, sociology, religion or philosophy, not aesthetic values. On that dogma, supported as it is by the whole force of the modern science of art, the practice of contemporary art stands or falls.⁸⁶

The notion for which Read can find no justification, that art is 'a perceptual or intellectual activity concerned with the formulation of absolute or ideal types' is the exact interpretation which Hulme had insidiously drawn from Worringer's 'modern psychology of art'. Read's statement repudiates the Modernist principles represented by his theoretical predecessor: it claims as invalid all metaphysical conclusions drawn from the basis of subjective aesthetics. Rather than trying to reassert art's disembodied allegiance to the conceptual and absolute abstractions of a metaphysically inclined mind, as was the case with Hulme, Herbert Read anchors its generation to the strictly personal operations of 'intuition' and discovers its substance in 'emotion'. He reclaims a proper basis in subjectivity for the aesthetic systems which, like Worringer's, developed around the psychological tenets of empathy theory but suffered absolutist applications at the hands of religious apologists such as Hulme.

The theological categories of judgement which had transgressed the psychological limitations of an underlying tradition of anthropomorphic aesthetics came to be increasingly discredited. There could be no wider philosophical justification for such manoeuvres. As Read claimed in 1949, 'we have now reached a stage of relativism in philosophy where it is possible to affirm that reality is in fact subjectivity, which means that the individual has no choice but to construct his own reality, however arbitrary and even "absurd" that may seem'.⁸⁷ Critical approbation was no longer lent to the transcendental forms of geometric abstraction, whether Byzantine mosaics or Wyndham Lewis's mechanization of organic form, but to the vivid forms of a Northern idiom, the strength of which 'lies in its humanism – in the fact that art cannot be limited to the search for any absolute, whether of reality or beauty, but must ever return to the essential dignity of our common human qualities, our human nature'.⁸⁸

3.2 Relocating Modernism

Having access to Worringer's thesis on Gothic, writers and artists could re-describe Hulme's one-sided propositions. Moreover, such a revision, introducing the idea that art does not exist in abstract relation to such Romantic criteria as race and geography but is of their very essence, would focus attention upon the hitherto overlooked phenomenon of the Northern will to form. This meant that the Modernist principles espoused by a theorist such as Hulme might not only be rejected on the basis of their philosophical shortcomings, but replaced with an expressive paradigm which, gaining the philosophical sanction of empathy theory, could be claimed as indigenous and

natural to a particular cultural psychology. No longer would the British artist or writer seek certainty in lifeless monuments of unageing intellect. What began instead was a chase to the sources of subjectivity rediscovered in mythology, landscape and the primal forms of a peculiarly British art.

The resurrection of such race-Romanticism was an important coup, given that reactions to early Modernism were ranged not only against the formalist enemy within but what was happening on the international scene. Empathy theory, raised from the anti-Romantic doctrines of abstraction, would gain artistic application through beliefs which had become critically marginalized; beliefs such as the one held by Vernon Lee, which I repeat again here, that 'aesthetic form which gives us joy is giving us the finest vital rhythms and patterns of a great, rich, and harmonious individual, and the scheme, so to speak, of what has proved most beneficial and enduring in the vital modes of the race'.⁸⁹

According to Herbert Read 'a renewed contact with tradition may have as much revolutionary significance as any originality in style or technique. The validity of a tradition depends on its retention of the element of sensibility'.⁹⁰ Hence, from Worringer's definitions of an archetypal Northern will to form, British artists and writers derived their own catalogue of psychologically determined forms. The typology of modern British art was now formulated not according to the aesthetic criteria of our own Imagism, Vorticism or 'classicism', nor indeed was it judged against the prevailing formalism of post-Impressionist Parisian modes; instead it was deemed to have an affinity with a profoundly Romantic tradition. More specifically still, in many cases, it was supposed to have its deepest roots in the indigenous artistic will to form of the Celtic peoples. For, taking the term Gothic in its widest generic sense, Worringer could state that 'the Germanic peoples are therefore not the sole exponents of Gothic nor its sole creators: Celts and Latins have an equally important share in Gothic development'.⁹¹

Nikolaus Pevsner perhaps marks the apogee of this line of argument in his *Reith Lectures* of 1955, including in his definitions of the 'Englishness of English art' a Celtic quality concentrated in the Scottish aesthetic volition. He conceives an apposite metaphor in the reconstruction of Coventry Cathedral – a Modernist vision of Gothic built on the blitzed British landscape by a Scot: 'The feeling of a capacity to draw on an obscure store of Celtic fantasy and magic may even (though only in conjunction with a training in the office of Lutyens) account for the surprising qualities of Mr Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral.'⁹²

Worringer had drawn a distinction between an abstract power of expression deriving from a transcendental world-view and the sensuousness which arises from a psychological disposition ordered towards empathy. He did not, however, posit an incommunicable divide between such qualities, locating instead a synthesis or 'ideal reconciliation' in the principles of Gothic art. To initiate our demonstrations of how this dialectical principle was applied by the post-Hulme generation we may refer to Henry Moore, perhaps the most celebrated British artist of the twentieth century. Moore claims that 'beauty, in the later Greek or Renaissance sense, is not the aim in my sculpture. Between beauty of expression and power of expression there is a difference of function. The first aims at pleasing the senses, the second has a spiritual vitality which for me is more moving and goes deeper than the senses'.⁹³ Although Moore insists upon powerful spiritual expression in the work of art in opposition to an acquiescent Hellenism, this does not conclude in the lifeless, transcendental formalism advocated by T.E. Hulme. In actual fact, Moore, in accordance with Worringer's conception of a synthetic Gothic will to form, commits himself to a belief in the importance of the anthropological values underlying such expression: 'Abstract qualities of design are essential to the value of a work, but to me of equal importance is the psychological, human element. If both abstract and human elements are welded together in a work, it must have a fuller, deeper meaning' (p.30).

Henry Moore makes his statement as part of the manifesto produced by a group of artists naming themselves 'Unit 1'. Under the organizational authority of Herbert Read members of the group such as Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Paul Nash reveal their solidarity against the exclusively formalist tenets of an earlier Modernist agenda. By rediscovering the truly dialectical nature of German aesthetics which implicitly form the basis of its art, contemporary British expression might embrace an 'ideal reconciliation' of the qualities which had hitherto suffered rigid segregation. In this respect, Henry Moore and like-minded artists are given philosophical and cultural credibility by Pevsner, who proclaims that a truly English art cannot tolerate the flawed and one-sided hermeneutics of Modernist theory. The same reason, Pevsner surmises, also explains the relegation of this progressive expression from the dominant tradition of Modernism which, owing to the violence of its partisan assertions, sets the terms of the critical debate, no matter how philosophically unbalanced they be:

The romantic topography of Christopher Wood and then Mr John Piper, Eric Ravilious, and some others may delight us and be specifically English, but I doubt whether in a future display of twentieth-century painting the English will be among the principal contributors...If England seems so far incapable of leadership in twentieth-century painting, the extreme contrast between

the spirit of the age and English qualities is responsible. Art in her leaders is violent today; it breaks up more than it yet reassembles. England dislikes violence and believes in evolution. So here, spirit of the age and spirit of England seem incompatible.⁹⁴

Pevsner sympathizes with the plight of English art against an international violence of expression, anticipating the need to document a movement whose philosophical counter-attack upon abstraction will come to be ignored by a criticism still fixed upon the clamour of the formalist *Zeitgeist*. This documentation can continue by bringing to attention an historical analogy presented by Herbert Read in his work *The Meaning of Art*. Here, Read details the progress of the Northern will to form in which nascent abstractions become humanized as the religious disposition of primitive culture changes from a rigorous transcendentalism to a mystical immanence. Read gives his own account of the neo-Hegelian process whereby absolute spirit, through the agency of Christianity, becomes sensualized and gathered into subjectivity. Doing so, he embraces the evolutionary approach to aesthetics considered to be so truly English by Pevsner (recognized as ultimately Germanic by us):

Into this gloomy and abstract field of art the symbols of Christianity come like visitants from an exotic land. In a prickly nest of geometrical lines, two birds of paradise will settle, carrying in their beaks a bunch of Eastern grapes. David comes with his harp, and the three children in the furnace; Adam and Eve, and the sacrifice of Isaac, are represented in panels reserved among the bands of abstract ornament; and finally the stone is dominated by Christ in Glory and the company of angels. Such stones still stand where they were erected centuries ago in Ireland and Scotland; and no monuments in the world are so moving in their implications; they symbolize ten thousand years of human history, and represent that history at its spiritual extremes, nearest and farthest from the mercy of God.⁹⁵

Hugh MacDiarmid quotes this passage in his book *The Aesthetics of Scotland*, referring 'gratefully to the period in the 20s during which Dr. Read occupied the Chair of Fine Arts in Edinburgh University and stirred up the dovecots there with his lively modernistic doctrines and impatience with pompous humbugs'.⁹⁶ MacDiarmid was aware that Read's work was here – as in many other cases – a stylistically eloquent, although in substance almost direct, transcription of Worringer. Nonetheless, his tribute to Read's historied methodology is significant, displaying the interest shown by a major twentieth-century poet in the reconciliation of extremes specific to the psychological material of a certain people. Having endured ten thousand years of

marginalization, Herbert Read attempts to centralize the forms which preserve our most significant ability: a capacity to assimilate the worlds of both spirit and nature.

3.3 Spirit, Nature and the 'Ceaseless Melody of Northern Line'

Read's definition of the Gothic will to form is glossed from Worringer's notion of an 'ideal reconciliation' of spirit and nature at the apotheosis of the Northern tradition of artistic expression. Instead of proposing Dürer or Holbein as typical examples of the Northern artist, however, Read offers us a national alternative in the person of William Blake who, along with Samuel Palmer perhaps, was henceforth to become amongst artists and critics of the period more frequently evoked than any other figure as the greatest exponent of our reconstructed Romantic tradition:

Blake himself said: 'Grecian is Mathematic Form: Gothic is Living Form. Mathematic Form is eternal in the Reasoning Memory: Living Form is Eternal Existence'; and these words reveal his profound understanding of the essentials of Gothic art. Gothic art is linear art, and it is living. In its origins it arises from the animation of the abstract geometrical art of Northern Europe by the sensuous Oriental transcendentalism of Christianity. The art retains its linear emphasis (the linear emphasis of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon art), but, instead of the cold formality of a geometrical pattern, adapts this sense of form to the expression of a living, natural sensuous feeling – a feeling for life, for nature, for the divine unity of the visible world. In Gothic art at its zenith we find a great depth of feeling and imaginative creativeness given form and definition by an absolute adherence to the precision of linear outline. The greatest force flows through the most definite channels; and that is why Gothic art, in spite of its confused origins and in spite of its chaotic developments, is indubitably the greatest type of art yet achieved by man.⁹⁷

Herbert Read claims that 'we today are nearer to Blake because we are nearer to the Gothic spirit' (p.165), the Gothic spirit being that which allows, at the 'zenith' of the Northern will to form, an abstract expressiveness to become the interpreter of 'a feeling for life, for nature'. Herbert Read's analysis of Gothic with respect to Blake bears no difference to Worringer's explication of the Gothicism attained by Dürer and Holbein. Both theorists seem to have in mind analogies with their own contemporary art: if Herbert Read writes of Blake with Ben Nicholson and Paul Nash in mind, Worringer draws his own parallels, recognizing what 'we Northern men honour in Hans von Marées, with his great fragmentary, enigmatic art'.⁹⁸

What is described by both Worringer and his disciple Read is a process whereby the abstract principles of expression withdraw from externality to merge with the sensuous object represented. In other words, spirit is no longer imposed upon the world from without but becomes sublimated. The Gothic artist, representing nature, gives simultaneous definition to an immanent spiritual principle. Blake, like Dürer and Holbein, produces an art which uses abstract form – what Worringer calls the ‘Northern Line’ – but which allows this spiritual idiom the flexibility, the empathic capacity, to re-create life. The same synthetic characteristic, phrased in ‘the linear emphasis of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon art’, is described time and time again by the new generation of British Modernists. Paul Nash writes for Unit 1:

English art has always shown particular tendencies which recur throughout its history. A pronounced linear method in design, no doubt traceable to sources in Celtic ornament, or to a predilection for the Gothic idiom. A peculiar bright delicacy in choice of colours – somewhat cold but radiant and sharp in key. A concentration, too, in the practice of portraiture; as though everything must be a likeness rather than an equivalent; not only eligible persons and parts of the countryside, but the very dew, the light, the wind as it passed. Blake, even, made a portrait of the ghost of a flea.⁹⁹

Paul Nash, like Herbert Read endorses a ‘pronounced linear method in design’ combined with a clear representation and celebration of the minutely observed natural world: the Northern synthesis of abstraction and empathy. The American scholar Robert Rosenblum confirms this self-consciously Romantic aesthetic. He offers as his definition of a Northern Romantic archetype, extending, indeed, into modern art, ‘a polarity between the abstract and the empirical, the universal and the specific...where the extremes of the most close-eyed perceptions of nature and the most visionary, abstract forms and systems are juxtaposed, and, at times, combined’.¹⁰⁰ This returns us again to Herbert Read who had claimed in his landmark essay on ‘English Art’ that the ‘Celtic strain in the English race, pressing us on, in Matthew Arnold’s words, “to the impalpable, the ideal”’,¹⁰¹ is also ‘by a process of compensation or reaction perhaps induced by other elements in our racial blend, the cause of the minute particularity of our objective vision’ (p.270). Rosenblum identifies no more than that synthesis with which an earlier British generation sought to pervade the national critical and artistic consciousness: an abstract Celtic or Gothic will to form entering into communication and exchange, attaining an ideal correspondence with, an emotionally and sensually experienced world.

Thus, anticipating Geoffrey Grigson's statement of 1948 that the exponents of the new British Romanticism should understand 'the probity of draughtsmanship, of that process in which the whole being of the artist, his consciousness and unconsciousness, drives down into the fine point of pencil or pen, which draws the object both as itself and as the self of the draughtsman',¹⁰² John Piper reclaims the importance of England's early sculptors, who, more than anyone else 'used the rigid rules for their own enrichment and delight, producing works which obeyed the rules strictly, and were yet saturated with their own personalities and bursting with life'.¹⁰³ Piper gives his authoritative account of an artistic volition involving an empirical depiction of nature (psychological and otherwise) mediated in concordance with abstract, mathematical and scholastic rules. The identification of this synthetic will to form brings him in line with Read, Nash, and Grigson and within the generic principles identified by Rosenblum. But Piper carries his historical example further still, claiming that the tradition of Modernism associated with the formalist strictures of post-Impressionism, far from setting aesthetic imperatives passively received by an unimaginative Britain, had its much earlier analogue in this early Gothicism:

From the eighth century onwards, for about five hundred years, sculptors were dealing with forms very like those used by artists in our time working in the light of (or reacting from) the achievement of Cézanne, Seurat and the Cubists. The purely non-figurative artists of some early Northumbrian and Cornish crosses were the forebears of the pure abstractionists of to-day. There were also early reactions against recognized forms, and obvious expressions of the subconscious, that find a contemporary parallel in surrealism. Many a Picasso-like profile is to be found on twelfth-century fonts and capitals. (p.118)

Piper even goes so far as to suggest that these early forms do not simply anticipate the pure abstractions of continental Modernism but prefigure a specifically British reaction to their various privations. Created as long ago as the eighth century, they offer an alternative tradition to that which culminates in Cubism, displaying a reaction against the 'recognized forms' of abstraction and depending not upon transcendental values but an interior world of subjectivity. In this light a comparison may be noted between Piper's photograph of the font at Toller Fratrum (Fig. 4), whose composition he describes as showing an 'immense personal conviction' (p.120), and the organic form of Jacob Epstein's *Primeval Gods* of 1931-1933 (Fig. 5) – a piece in marked stylistic contrast to the earlier *Rock-Drill* (Fig. 1). As he continues his descriptions of this

endemic tendency, Piper asserts, in line with the general manifesto, that it attains its greatest statement in an artist such as Blake:

This early art that shows a specially English character was nourished from many sources. Celtic, Norse and Byzantine influences were of great importance. After the Conquest, an all-pervading form was evolved under the influence of the Normans which had, whatever its individual twists, a Byzantine sense of austerity animated by a strong linear rhythm – a native characteristic. Towards the end of English Romanesque this particular kind of order is to be seen everywhere. A good example of it is the tympanum at Rowstone, Herefordshire. Here a sustained line is used in a most subtle way to charge a design which is at once rhythmical and rigid – as if the Christ enthroned is both a seated, immovable majesty and a flowing, abundant Life. Not again until Blake did this specially English genius show itself so well: this genius for making a line at once create a shape and enrich it with meaning as part of a whole design, for making, in Blake's own words: 'firm and determinate lineaments unbroken by shadows, which ought to display and not hide the form...Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the Almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist.' (pp.122-123)

Piper speaks of a 'specially English genius' able to merge an austere lifeless abstraction reminiscent of Byzantine form with a deep feeling for nature. The cold abstractions of Oriental form so celebrated by T.E. Hulme are given the native characteristic of a 'strong linear rhythm'; they are animated, humanized, come increasingly under the charge of a tendency to empathy. An apposite example of the dynamic, implicit will to form is provided by the synthesis, in one parochial sculptural expression, of a rigidly conceptual and intractable Christ with a celebration of Christ as spirit incarnate in life – as God in man. Such a dialectical arrangement, in which spiritualized expression moves from its inscrutable formal position beyond the content of the subjective and organic world to reveal itself as part of that world and through that world, replays the Hegelian and deeply Romantic movement from transcendental to immanent expression: from the realm of 'death and the invisible' which both Hegel and Worringer had posited as the *geist* of pyramidal abstraction to the principle of an absolute inner subjectivity at the apogee of Northern expression. The same characteristics are again exemplified by David Jones in 1941, and again with special reverence for Blake:

Certainly linear vitality and flexibility rather than the dispositions of masses is true to the native genius. This crops up again and again, as, for instance, in the English illuminated Mss., when a heavier and less free continental tradition has not supervened. Again, earlier still, it has been noted

that something of the sort is apparent in the work of the mixed Celts of the island, before the 'Roman order' mass-produced academic vulgarities (an example of a culture, though a dying one, going under before a civilization). It is present in the few remaining fragments of genuine English stained glass and in obscure carvings. It is triumphant in English needlework in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the blithe meanders of which are in pathetic contrast with the dreary and dark tangle in religion and politics.

This vigorous linear thing bursts out in William Blake and others of less genius...I think it is true to say that it is *the lyrical plus the observed* that has been, and is, most saving to the men of our common soil and mixed blood – we usually come a cropper with anything other.¹⁰⁴

Jones, defending the virtues of a native genius, notes the strength of this insular volition 'when a heavier and less free continental tradition has not supervened'. As a continuing example of such genius David Jones might have cited the poet Basil Bunting who, having pursued the American – or international – objectivism of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky, would return to Northumberland and write his celebrated poem *Briggflats* of 1966. Returning to origins, he exemplifies the indigenous characteristics documented by Jones, taking as a model for his poetry the English illuminated manuscripts of the Lindisfarne Gospels with their interlaced abstract and natural patterns. His 'autobiographical' but self-consciously modern poem is structured according to the principles drawn out by the Northern Line.

The fusion which Jones identifies and Bunting seeks to fulfil, between an abstract linear expression – the self-referential 'lyricism' of the Northern Line – and the world of the empirical or the observed, finds equivalences in the investigations of Nikolaus Pevsner, whose entire thesis on the Englishness of English art is constructed around the identification of an endless exchange between these same polarities. They can be seen to occur, for example, between the irrational 'flaming lines' of Blake and the decorated style on the one hand and the lucid and rational articulations of perpendicular on the other. Indeed, he states, it can be traced back 'to the illuminated manuscripts of the seventh and eighth centuries in Northumberland as well as Ireland, and perhaps, though more hesitatingly, to the style of the Celtic Britons in England in the Iron Age, the spiral scrolls decorating the Desborough Mirror at the British Museum and the shield from the Thames in the same collection'.¹⁰⁵

When Pevsner states that the 'preference for the observed fact and the personal experience is indeed, as is universally known, the hall-mark of English philosophy through the ages' (p.46), we are reminded of the empirical basis of empathy theory, the notion that all abstraction had originally to be predicated upon some measurable

subjective condition. And this indeed is the conclusion that we have reached generally about the highest statement of the Northern will to form: that a spiritual, disembodied linear mode of expression develops an affinity with the natural object to be portrayed, and neither can the general subjective conditions of the creator be excluded from the aesthetic equation. Although Pevsner can venture (whilst excepting the case of Henry Moore whose 'unmixed Yorkshire' confounds his generalization) that 'the English are not a sculptural nation' (p.137) and that 'the majority of Norman decoration is abstract, not figural' (p.137), it is clear, none the less, that such abstraction is not of an absolute kind but takes as its direct basis natural form and feeling. Therefore, extending his historical enquiry into a later context, he remarks that 'Morris's designs are paraphrases of natural growth. His observation of tree and flower was as close and intense as that of any English landscape painter. But his genius lies in the conversion of these observed data into perfectly fitting surface patterns' (p.107).

The modern critic Philip Pacey, commenting on the poetic work of amongst others David Jones, Basil Bunting and Hugh MacDiarmid, identifies this concept of the Northern or Celtic line and, making reference to Jacques Maritain whose important aesthetic conclusions shall occupy us in the near future, claims

Music is as 'abstract' as Celtic line (which is not to say that either is merely decorative); yet to suppose that it cannot gather to itself and 'lift up' the contactual world is to presuppose a silent universe. Poet and musician do well to hearken to, but not, of course, to imitate, the music which Nature breathes through matter. And now it may need to be stressed, that, 'dead to himself', the poet cannot, must not, eliminate himself. Earth's eye, tongue, heart and (we may add) ear and interpreter, he is inseparable from the whole whose music he would sing, and especially from that portion of the whole which is 'his' and, in its unique juxtaposition of this and that, uniquely reflecting him, is *only* his to work with; he 'cannot express himself in a work except on condition that things resound in him...', but on the contrary 'If he hears the passwords and the secrets that are stammering in things...it is not by disengaging this objectivity for itself, but by receiving all this into the recesses of his sentiment and of his passion'.¹⁰⁶

Again, referring to this English linear tradition with respect to David Jones's art and poetry, Pacey claims that 'although line is of course a convention, an "abstract" rather than a realistic way of rendering the separateness and definiteness of objects, where there is line with colour objects cannot be entirely dissolved' (p.130). In both cases Pacey is recalling that idea offered by Worringier, in which 'the spiritual expressive value of the line became simultaneously the interpreter of the spiritual energy of the

thing represented'; Pacey, in postulating the actual existence of this Celtic line, is not so much identifying an absolute character of British art as continuing, within his own eloquent, overtly subjective criticism, an indigenous appropriation of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century German Romanticism.

3.4 'The Intricate Architecture of Trees': Paul Nash and Further Gothic Ramifications

Whether in the prosaic descriptions that can be found in his autobiographical work *Outline* and numerous other articles, or in his pictorial and photographic work, Paul Nash maintains the greatest reverence for the natural form, in particular that of the tree. When he embarks upon his accounts of a nature ravaged during the First World War, or presents us with a painting such as *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* (Fig. 6), it is possible for the contemplating subject to feel in the work, as Rosenblum puts it, 'so intense an empathy of the artist with the life of an individual tree that this inanimate landscape component can suddenly become a sentient, almost human presence' (p.36).

Nash's love of the forest form constitutes more than a bucolic celebration of an irretrievable past. That is not to deny the fact that it performs such an elegiac function; it does, and especially in the context of an exploded, war-torn Northern landscape one of whose most prominent features became for Nash, in his capacity as official war artist, the truncated, abstract forms of a once vital, empathically known nature. But the terminology that has been introduced to describe one purpose of this symbol immediately returns us to the other, perhaps more important aspect: its philosophical and art-historical significance.

For Nash the tree represents an interpenetration of nature and spirit. It becomes for him a pantheistic symbol, a means by which the sacred principle of divinity finds expression in nature. As such it returns us to the very apex of the Northern psychology along with its iconic manifestations. The abstract woodcut of 1926, *Design of Arches* (Fig.7), evokes the patterns of the earlier naturalistic print *Winter Wood* (Fig. 8): the spiritual truths suggested by the purely rational perpendicular alignment of abstract arches can be traced back to the natural forms implicit in the mythology and dominating the landscape of the North. More specifically, we recall Worringer's descriptions of medieval architecture in which a scholastic frenzy of stone awakens, in accord with increasingly empathic perceptions, the organic eurhythmy of the Northern forest. Further back still may be noted Hegel's proposition that even symbolic architecture

'takes its starting point more or less from...organic formations' (II, 656), and in a critical overview Rosenblum claims that in some German, we might add British, views of Gothic architecture 'one finds the pervasive Romantic sensibility to the natural or organic aspects of Gothic architecture – a feeling that it is virtually a God-made object, its forms almost identical with the growth of leaves and branches, its cathedral naves a metamorphosis of a forest of trees' (p.28). Paul Nash, writing for *Country Life*, describes a mythical experience of what he terms 'unseen landscapes'. Doing so, he provides another resonant example of the Romantic conflation of architectural and natural form, admitting a bucolically minded readership into his own personal landscape vision where 'now the sun and moon traverse the floor and walls as in a wood, and the dilapidated uprights and broken sections of door frames, obscured by shadows or mutilated by shafts of light, take on the semblance of tree forms: the sentinels, perhaps, of a forest land'.¹⁰⁷

It is not surprising to learn that Paul Nash was familiar with Worringer's work, the dialectic it represents and the images it deploys. Nash's treatment of nature and divinity through the archetypal symbols of the forest and Gothic are directly related to an aesthetic which seeks Worringer's 'ideal reconciliation'. Therefore, in an article of 1935 entitled 'For But Not With', he ventures his opinions on the practice of abstract art:

To begin with, I will turn...to the quotation I made from Herbert Read's comments on Worringer's theory of fixed conceptual images. Referring again to geometrical art in general, he admits that it is possible to regard it as an art of despair, 'an art merely of escape from the complexity and confusion of modern life.' Whether this is just or not, or whether it matters or not, the art of escape is not the prerogative of the practitioners of a purely geometrical art...I find my piece of world cannot be expressed within the restrictions of a non-figurative idiom...Apart from the world of 'pure' invention free from association with recognisable objects, I have no doubt, that the infinite variations of nature may be resolved with an equally incalculable number of complete abstractions. Yet I find I still need partially organic features to make my fixed conceptual image. I discern among natural phenomena a thousand forms which might, with advantage, be dissolved in the crucible of abstract transfiguration; but the hard cold stone, the rasping grass, the intricate architecture of trees and waves, or the brittle sculpture of a dead leaf – I cannot translate altogether beyond their own image, without suffering in spirit. My aim in symbolical representation and abstraction, although governed by a purpose with a formal ideal in view, seeks always to give life to a conception within the formal shell.¹⁰⁸

Nash's declaration that 'I still need partially organic features to make my fixed conceptual image' is in accord with Worringer's thesis on Gothic which does not, in fact, consider all geometric or abstract art solely as a means 'of escape from the complexity and confusion of modern life'. Although Worringer's definition of Oriental abstraction did indeed provide analogies for 'a pure geometrical art', it is his theory of the Northern will to form upon which Nash can model his aesthetic. For this is a volition in which life or nature always underlies 'a conception within the formal shell', in which the 'intricate architecture of trees' never suffers absolute entombment in lifeless stone. Paul Nash demonstrates an awareness of the various principles which Worringer's thesis affords the Modernist. But whereas a thinker such as T.E. Hulme lifts from Worringer's system a dead-end conception of abstraction, Nash formulates his ideas in sympathy with the main dialectical current of his Romantic philosophy.

Thus it is that Herbert Read in his monograph on Nash can draw a distinction between his early landscapes in which 'the pattern of drooping boughs and fan-shaped foliage is sophisticated: it is imposed on the natural facts, not emergent from them',¹⁰⁹ and later post First World War paintings such as those made at Dymchurch (Fig. 9) when 'the artist was in England again, in woods and valleys from which the evil spirits had long ago absconded' (p.10) and which, initially seeming 'the most formal and geometric of the artist's works', in fact reveal that:

the form is inherent in the scene – in the long, low level stretches of the beach, in the linear perspective of the sea-wall. Here were natural elements which lent themselves without distortion to the tendency towards abstraction which the post-impressionist movement had inherited from Cézanne. In so far as the abstraction was inherent in the scene it might be said that the artist's task was made easy for him: he could get his abstract effect without too much distortion. But the ease of this particular solution only served to make clear to the artist that success depended on the reconciliation of form and fact. (p.10)

Herbert Read interprets the change in his subject's work according to Worringer's Northern model. The geometric order of the later painting owes nothing to the externally imposed metaphysical distortions – post-Impressionist abstractions – which may have influenced less mature work. Indeed, the formal principle of the work is discovered not in spite of nature, but through its empathic consideration. Blake being the figure whom both Read and Nash considered to be the greatest indigenous exponent of Romanticism, it is apposite that, in describing his work, Robert Rosenblum seems to echo Read's approbation of Nash: 'within this conceptual world of bounding contours

and abstract structures, the close perception of nature's surfaces began to appear' (p.56). Paul Nash in his contribution to the Unit 1 manifesto confirms the sources of his inspiration:

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, William Blake, then, and often now, called a madman, perceived among many things the hidden significance of the land he always called Albion. For him, Albion possessed great spiritual personality and he constantly inveighed against Nature, the appearance of which he mistrusted as a false reality. At the same time, his work was immensely influenced by the country he lived in. His poetry literally came out of England...In the same way, we, today, must find new symbols to express our reaction to environment. In some cases this will take the form of an abstract art, in others we may look for some different nature of imaginative research. But in whatever form, it will be a subjective art.¹¹⁰

To an extent, writes Nash, Blake mistrusted nature in the presence of a greater spiritual order. Nature should receive the abstract structures the visionary artist chooses to impose upon it. Those structures, however, do not turn out to be the constraints of a force external to nature but are modified by nature itself: 'his poetry literally came out of England'. This is the position, according to Nash, for which the modern artist should demonstrate respect and emulate, a position which, no matter how much it recommends the marshalling of nature, cannot avoid its deepest principles. Therefore, he concludes, every form of art, however abstract it may appear, must forever remain a subjective art. The structuring criterion is not the operation of a transcendent God, but an imaginative force working from within the interiority of the artist, a Romantic mythology subsisting in the nature of mind and land – a force personified, by Blake, as Albion. Nash writes of an equivalent 'genius loci', a spiritual force empathically perceived through the subjective contemplation of nature, and offers a quintessentially British example:

Once the rather futile game of 'picking out' the White Horse is abandoned, the documentary importance of the site fades, and the *landscape* asserts itself with all the force of its triumphant fusion of natural and artificial design. You then perceive a landscape of terrific animation whose bleak character and stark expression accord perfectly with its lonely situation on the summit of the bare downs.¹¹¹

The previous winter John Piper found himself inclined to draw an analogy between the English landscape and Modernist abstract art, positioning an aerial photograph and an engraving of Silbury Hill next to a painting by Miró (Fig. 10). Piper draws attention to

the natural basis of abstraction by demonstrating how the organic features of the land presuppose its spatial, disembodied representation. From the air the naturalistic content of the landscape reduces itself to a planar representation: 'Flying (whether we do it ourselves or not) has changed our sense of spaces and forms and vistas enormously. From the air, hills flatten out and towns are seen at a glance in the sense or nonsense of their planning.'¹¹² But this abstracted pattern is, of course, predicated upon the vital and loved topographical haunts of the romantically disposed artist and reveals, for the first time, the physical signs of history which have served as the hidden *genius loci* inspiring generations of poetic response: 'Barrows that were ploughed up years ago, depressions in the ground that were the sites of dwellings or stone or wood circles, and so on' (p.5).

3.5 Critical Oversights 1: John Piper, Gothic and the Case Against Antiquarianism

Paul Nash, whilst stating his support for a conception of abstraction which had nature as its underlying principle, argued the impossibility of his concurrence with a corrupted application of the term in which form sought absolute cessation with the organic. Less than a year after his article revealing the Romantic implications of aerial photography, John Piper aims a more specific attack at the practitioners of abstraction:

Abstraction is a luxury. Yet some painters today indulge in it as if it was the bread of life. The early Christian sculptors, wall-painters and glass-painters had a sensible attitude towards abstraction. However hard one tries (many attempts have been made to make them tow the line with modern art) one cannot catch them out indulging in pure abstraction. Their abstraction, such as it is, is always subservient to an end – the Christian end, as it happened.

Abstraction is a luxury that has been left to the present day to exploit. It is a luxury just as any single ideal is, and like a single ideal it should be *approached* all the time, but not pre-supposed all the time.¹¹³

Many attempts, claims Piper, have been made to make medieval artists tow the line with modern art: attempts to search backwards for metaphysical, scholastic, ascetic systems of thought that might serve as some aesthetic justification for a new geometric art. But Piper can find no substance in these enquiries. The type of medievalism he has in mind is one which would offer no such excuse for 'indulging in abstraction'. Piper's vision

of Gothicism draws heavily upon Worringer's 'ideal reconciliation' forged at the height of Northern art and religion: the psychological disposition which allows that formal expression should reveal along with its spiritually expressive value a subjective content. This, ventures Piper, is what the modern artist must seek in reaction to categories of expression which, indulging in pure abstraction, pledge spurious allegiance to a rigorous scholasticism.

Statements such as those made by John Piper and Paul Nash demonstrate a degree of intellectual perspicuity often unrecognized by critics of the Modernist genre. Charles Harrison in his work *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939* claims that 'for many artists in the later thirties an explicit Romanticism, or rather, at worst, a whimsical revivalism, came increasingly to supplant commitment to modernist developments. This was particularly true of some of the younger painters, John Piper foremost among them'.¹¹⁴ He continues: 'Piper's own work, which at least in 1934-1936 had signalled a determined apprenticeship to some considerable continental models, became increasingly a matter of finding means to make the technical mannerisms of modern painting serve a fashionable interest in picturesque architectural detail or "gothick" landscapes' (p.321).

Harrison's critical stance reduces Piper's aesthetic endeavour to the level of fashionable pastiche and whimsical revivalism, celebrating in its place the importance of those continental models which, he condescendingly ventures, Piper had originally done so well to imitate. But Piper's opinions of those continental models has already been seen; it had been his claim that instead of 'monuments of a clever but only half-directioned age, it will be a good thing to get back to the tree in the field that everybody is working for. For it is certainly to be hoped that we shall get back to it as a fact, as a reality. As something more than an ideal'.¹¹⁵ Piper astutely recognizes the half-truth of predominating modes of Modernist expression and seeks to reconstitute its full significance according to the original dialectical theories from which it arose. Because he often chooses to effect this with reference to that great architectural metaphor of Gothic (Fig. 11), whose provenance is to be located in the systems of the founders of modern aesthetics, his art is termed picturesque and considered unworthy of any great critical attention. It is ironic that those abstract paintings which Harrison considered promising apprentice pieces to a far more significant continental tradition, in my view strongly evoke another of John Piper's artistic skills: the making of stained glass windows to decorate the mystical interiority of churches.

It was Piper's intent to restore a naturalistic content, an experiential basis, to an art which he considered to have remained abstract for too long; but rather than going

backwards, as Harrison suggests, John Piper and other artists of his generation considered themselves to be fulfilling a dialectical progress forwards:

And now where are we? Where is the subject, or the object, or the subject or sub-object, or whatever it is your fancy to call it? In oblivion still? One thing is certain about all activities since cubism: artists everywhere have done their best to find something to replace the object that cubism destroyed. They have visited museums, and skidded back through the centuries, across whole continents and civilizations in their search. They have been frantic and calm by turns. They have adopted simple means, and very complicated ones. They have gone a long way in space as well as time. In this country, for instance, we find Paul Nash identifying all nature with a Bronze Age standing stone, and Ben Nicholson even assisting at world-creation. Henry Moore has landed us back in the stomach of pre-history, while Paul Nash, again, leaves us with the bare sea-washed bones of it...It all seems to me an attempt to *return* to the object, not to escape from it. (p.70)

Piper heralds a return to the sensuous object and away from the pure abstraction characteristic of Cubism or any other form of non-empirical, idealist expression. He claims that 'the object must grow again; must reappear as the "country" that inspires painting. (It may, at the worst, turn out to be a night-bomber, or reappear in a birth-control poster – but it will grow again, somehow)' (p.72). His powers of prediction are confirmed when in 1942 Paul Nash, five years after this declaration of need, wrote about the personification of abstract machinery which, with its dehumanized implications, had been so appealing to earlier exponents of Modernism. In particular, Nash wrote about the empathy he felt for the 'Personality of Planes':

Everywhere one looked, alarming and beautiful monsters appeared – the tank, the airplane, the submarine, the torpedo, all had individual beauty in terms of colour, form and line, but beyond, or was it *behind* that actual appearance, these things possessed each a personality, difficult to define and yet undeniable. It was not wholly a matter of mechanistic character. There seemed to be involved some *other* animation, 'a life of their own' is the nearest expression I can think of, which often gave them the suggestion of human or animal features.¹¹⁶

More than anything else, however, it is probably Piper's preoccupations with ecclesiology which induces critics such as Harrison to interpret his work in terms of a simplistic and retrospective conservatism, a belated nineteenth-century Gothic revivalism; yet it was by means of this architectural metaphor that Piper demonstrated

his sophisticated theoretical intention of effecting the move from an eschatological formalism to a subjectively ordered humanism. In his essay 'Pleasing Decay', for example, he discloses English attitudes to architectural form – in particular Gothic – in order to further the central theme of his argument that nature always reclaims abstraction:

the tendency of nature is to induce every building to come back to her arms, sooner or later; rust, lichen, moss, the cracking and powdering of mortar in joints, of the stone and brick itself – all these are the forms of nature's expression of jealousy at the presence of man's creations. Nature never lets up on her passion to see buildings in her own image.¹¹⁷

This is not merely some whimsical and defeatist antiquarianism, nor is it a return to Ruskinian medievalism and the *fin-de-siècle* Romanticism of William Morris; on the contrary, it is a deliberate expansion beyond the aesthetic strictures thrown up in the vociferous reaction to such systems. Piper's theoretical apparatus does not stumble on purblindly from the blast created by the Modernism of Hulme's *Speculations*, Lewis's Vorticism, Pound's Imagism and all those sects whose polemic was ordered against the perceived complacency of a humanist tradition attaining its effusive crescendo in the pre-Raphaelite idiom. More than this, it attempts to retrieve from beneath the hastily erected monuments of Modernist pessimism a new and stronger link with the profound and unaffected foundations of a Romantic past. Piper's piece on pleasing decay is testament to a process of excavation, in which the latent forms of the North are recovered in place of contemporary abstractions. In this context Oswald Spengler noted

the wistful regard of the Faustian soul for ruins and evidences of the distant past, its proneness to the collection of antiquities and manuscripts and coins, to pilgrimages to the Forum Romanum and to Pompeii, to excavations and philological studies... moved by a secret piety to preserve the aqueducts of the Campagna, the Etruscan tombs, the ruins of Luxor and Karnak, the crumbling castles of the Rhine, the Roman Limes, Hersfeld and Paulinzella from becoming mere rubbish – but we keep them *as ruins*, feeling in some subtle way that reconstruction would deprive them of something, indefinable in terms, that can never be reproduced.¹¹⁸

Piper's essay is a precise translation, into a popular and accessible idiom, of Spengler's Faustian regard for the past and its icons. For Piper 'in most buildings, from barns and farms to Westminster Hall and the Tower of London, their power to

move us is enormously enhanced by the visible effects of history in terms of "decay" (p.102). Similarly, for Spengler, 'what does a cathedral dome or a bronze figure mean to us without the patina which transmutes the short-range brilliance into the tone of remoteness of time and place?' (I, 253). What is evinced is a deep-rooted Northern or Faustian pull towards a fusion of history and nature along with its corresponding antipathy to the icons of modernity. What is evoked is a feeling that these abstracted modern forms should be gathered into a sense of nature (or 'place') and enfolded in a temporal continuum connecting ideas of pastness with the present. Piper, perpetuating his aesthetic discourse, includes in his account of pleasing decay, from which I quote, Henry James's pastoral account of Gothic from his *English Hours* of 1905:

It has often seemed to me in England that the purest enjoyment of architecture was to be had among the ruins of great buildings. In the perfect building, one is rarely sure that the impression is simply architectural: it is more or less pictorial and romantic; it depends partly upon association and partly upon various accessories and details which, however they may be wrought into the architectural idea, are not part of its essence and spirit. But in so far as beauty of structure is beauty of line and curve, balance and harmony of masses and dimensions, I have seldom relished it as deeply as on the grassy nave of some crumbling church, before lonely columns and empty windows where the wild flowers were a cornice and the sailing clouds a roof. (p.90)

In an anthology of articles from *The Builder* of 1928 W.R. Lethaby, architect, architectural theorist and first professor of design at the Royal College of Art in Kensington, states an affinity between his ideas and those of Worringer and Spengler. The historical objectivity this lends his argument is not so important, it is suspected, as the sense it affords him, as an aesthetician and emissary of modern art, of belonging to a deep-rooted Romantic tradition. Indeed, the fact that the psychological researches of Worringer and Spengler repudiate the very notion of historical objectivity gives furtherance to the idea that Lethaby was seeking, like Piper, to consolidate a contemporary relation to an indigenous, psychological will to form:

The Gothic art of the Middle Ages was an outcome of the whole mind and feeling of the times. In a recent essay, I tried to show that it was inspired (unconsciously) by the forest life and forest psychology (*The Legacy of the Middle Ages*). I have been gratified to find in Spengler's big book, *The Decline of the West*, the following, which seems as if it might have been the source of all I tried to say: 'The character of the cathedral is that of the forest, the transformation of columns into clustered piers that grow up out of the earth and spread on high into an infinite subdivision and interlacing of lines and branches; the giant windows by which the wall is dissolved and the

interior filled with mysterious light – these are the architectural actualising of a world feeling that had found first of all its symbols in the high forests of the Northern plains. The endless lonely twilight wood became the secret of wistfulness in all Western buildings, so that when the form energy died down the controlled line language resolved itself into naturalistic branches, twigs, leaves...’ I must say again, that in holding this same view, I do not mean that there was any conscious imitation of trees and woods, but only that the buildings were produced by the same minds and hearts that produced the forest ballads. A true architecture is built out of the hearts of the builders. In Worringer’s thoughtful work, *Form in Gothic*, he tries to disclose ‘the latent Gothic existing before true Gothic’ in the minds of a people.¹¹⁹

Lethaby quotes Oswald Spengler’s conception of a ‘form energy’ and a ‘controlled line language’ giving way to an increased interpretation of the natural world – an inescapably significant idea in the context of a developing British Modernism. Again, constructing the same sacrosanct metaphor, Nikolaus Pevsner in his guide to the late-Medieval chapter house at Southwell describes an architectural and theological synthesis of spiritual abstractions with the world of minutely observed natural form (Fig. 12): further proof of the far-reaching influence of the Hegelian aesthetic, an influence stretching beyond the rarefied contexts of its philosophical ramifications to the populist medium of the King Penguin guidebook:

And is not the balance of Southwell something deeper too than a balance of nature and style or of the imitative and the decorative? Is it not perhaps also a balance of God and World, the invisible and the visible? Could these leaves of the English countryside, with all their freshness, move us so deeply if they were not carved in that spirit which filled the saints and poets and thinkers of the thirteenth century, the spirit of religious respect for the loveliness of created nature? The inexhaustible delight in live form that can be touched with worshipping fingers and felt with all senses is ennobled – consciously in the philosophy of Thomas, the science of Albert, and the romance of Wolfram, unconsciously in the carving of the buttercups and thorn leaves and maple leaves of Southwell – by the conviction that so much beauty can exist only because God is in every man and beast, in every herb and stone. The Renaissance in the South two hundred years later was perhaps once again capable of such worship of beauty, but no firm faith was left to strengthen it.¹²⁰

The late medieval period comprises an outlook in which faith comes to be increasingly dominated by a pantheistic mysticism. Art, through its celebration of worldly beauty, anticipates the unadulterated naturalism of the Renaissance whilst still maintaining its

relation to pure spirit. Pevsner's high regard for this balance of 'God and World', which he identifies as the defining characteristic of English art, is evident in his descriptions of Southwell, to which he attributes exemplary status. Southwell represents the preservation of a precious Northern spirit in a world increasingly caught up in what we have already seen him describe as an extremist violence of attitude. Continuing with Piper's essay 'Pleasing Decay' the reader is offered a vernacular equivalent to Pevsner's ideal balance in the form of a quotation from the aerial archaeologist O.G.S. Crawford who confides that:

Of their kind there are few things more beautiful than the field-walls in a stony country...The walls of the moister West Country are the most beautiful of all, for innumerable plants take root in the earthy crevices and enrich the lovely grey stonework with a natural ornament that is entirely pleasing. Vivid green splashes of pennywort, yellow stars of celandine, clusters of violet, and the twisted cords of ivy are Nature's version of carved vine-scrolls and interlaced designs, with the added beauty of colour. Far be it from me to institute odious comparisons between the works of Man and of Nature; both are good to look upon, and I yield to none in admiration of the masterpieces of Anglian sculpture. But these, alas, are few and far between; they are not always accessible or easily seen; whereas there are, by way of compensation, hundreds of miles of most enchanting field-walls in Cornwall alone.¹²¹

Reading such a descriptions of ornament, carved vine scrolls and the interlaced designs of tracery reconstituted with the colour and vitality of nature, we remember Pacey's claim, with respect to the Celtic aesthetic volition, that 'where there is line with colour objects cannot be entirely dissolved'; we remember Piper's call for a return to the 'valuable object' of nature. Seven years previously the Welsh writer and philosopher of sensualism, John Cowper Powys, placed his protagonist Wolf Solent in a fictional context whose philosophical content and narrative scenario describe the same pantheistic Gothic:

Those lovely organic lines and curves, up there in the greenish dimness, challenged something in his soul that was hardly ever stirred by any work of art...This high fan-tracery roof, into whose creation so much calm, quiet mysticism must have been thrown, seemed to appeal with an almost personal sympathy to Wolf's deepest mind. Uplifted there, in the immense stillness of that enclosed space, above the dust and stir of all passing transactions, it seemed to fling forth, like some great ancient fountain in a walled garden, eternal arches of enchanted water that sustained, comforted, and healed.¹²²

For 'personal sympathy' here we might read 'empathy'. Indeed, Powys does not fail to provide his audience with a more complete reference to the dialectical aesthetic from whose premise he is working, introducing into Wolf's contemplation an element of abstraction: 'the amplitude of the beauty around him had indeed just then a curious and interesting psychic effect. In place of giving him the sensation that his soul had melted into these high-arched shadows, it gave him the feeling that the core of his being was a little, hard, opaque, round crystal!' (pp.128-129). Powys's use of this dialectical paradigm is given a more technical philosophical exposition by the author in 1930, demonstrating his debt to Hegel and his affinity with that group of Modernists to whom such patterns of thought were vital:

The deepest secret of the universe lies in duality, in contradiction, in the opposition of contraries. This is where so many unifying philosophies tread water in stagnant error. The subtlest reach of human metaphysic is to be found in certain gnomic sayings of Heraclitus and Hegel, wherein it is indicated that out of the conflict of Being with Not-Being the Becoming of life eternally proceeds. And if the essence of things lies in duality, in the struggle between the dynamic and the inert, between good and evil, between light and darkness, we must expect to find its conscious expression in duality too – in other words, in the psychic-physical tension of which pleasure overcomes pain, and happiness dominates unhappiness.¹²³

Perhaps Powys was recalling here Blake's philosophy of contraries – Blake who early in his career had intently studied the Gothic architecture and sepulchral monuments of Westminster abbey: 'Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.'¹²⁴ Wolf Solent's sympathy with the quiet mysticism discovered in the fan-tracery roof and the concomitant self-alienation or abstraction he appears to experience discovers a later analogue in the experience of Geoffrey Grigson on entering a cave at Pech Merle in France:

A cathedral: inside this cathedral I have felt – forgetting companions I had never met and guides and steps and tickets, and counters and Coca-Cola and a car park under the dry trees – as if I had entered Ely Cathedral by the Octagon, and as if I were making my roundabout secret way by clerestory gallery, by passages between the walls and in the walls, by openings, and by newels, past Gothic stalactites and diaper work and mouldings and stony foliage, down at last, knees a little weak, to the choir and the presbytery and the chantries and the Galilee and the extravagant Lady Chapel.¹²⁵

The Gallic cave, like the Celtic forest, gives a presentiment of the Gothic cathedral which no longer stands as an abstract mass of mechanical forces but reveals itself as the fantastic evolution of nature. Stalactites reside in columns, twisted perpendicular formations disguise themselves as newels, side-caverns appear as chapels, passages become side-aisles, eroded strata give the high arcading of the clerestory, calcification forms the basis of cusp-work and ornament. The cathedral has its genesis in the psychological and geological strata of Northern man.

But if the cathedral has its origination in such primal, natural forms, those forms must themselves display a spiritual intentionality, manifest an incarnational aspect. If the cathedral is an atavistic celebration of primitive dwelling, the cave also attains a teleological significance, suggests a final end beyond nature, radiates sacredness. Once more we are presented with Hegel's thesis of an immediate vacillation between the finitude of the natural and the infinitude of divinity. Revisited under another form is his figurative vision, given generic elaboration by Spengler and Worringer, of the cathedral fusing organic experience and spiritual aspiration. The cave and the cathedral are one and the same, just as spirit is immanent in nature and God in man. It is unsurprising to note, then, that the walls of Grigson's 'cathedral' are graced with the primitive musings of Worringer's Northern Line, through which abstractions merge with the natural object portrayed in the representation – expression not retreating into the transcendence of geometric form nor reposing in the sensualism of direct imitation, but celebrative of something in between:

'Naturalism' is the word for the animals of cave art: they are recognizable images of the natural, acutely emphasizing and combining elemental traits of life; they are not the sentimental copies of the academic realist, they are not the merely useful copies of the facsimilist...By their excellence the best of the engravings, the drawings, the paintings, imparted a shock or excitement of perception, which led to a meaning; and that meaning was not merely magical...it was sacramental, indicating all the life, all the *raison d'être*, enjoyed by men but also enjoyed by the animals they hunted...So Lascaux was a storehouse of red deer life, horse life, ox life, ibex life – indeed, of life itself, as Chartres or another cathedral or parish church can be felt as a storehouse of deity. (p.70)

Perhaps in order to completely dispel the idea that references to Gothic form in Modern art and literature are significant of nothing other than a particularized, whimsical and pedantic revivalism featured in the work of conservative reactionaries inclined to nationalism, we can borrow a transatlantic illustration from Robert

Rosenblum. Rosenblum, whose general argument holds that the Northern Romantic tradition in art stretches from early exponents such as Friedrich through to the Abstract Expressionism of Rothko and his contemporaries, offers an example from 1940 in which the Gothic metaphor attains a truly popular form of expression. The example is from Walt Disney's film *Fantasia*

in which, to the music of Schubert's *Ave Maria*, we saw a low, earthbound procession of nuns against the exalting background of a Northern forest whose tall, skeletal trees metamorphose before our eyes into what looks like the prototype of a Gothic nave, its vaulting branches so heaven-borne that they disappear above the frame. Disney's metaphor of a forest of trees as Gothic architecture and his placing of religious experience not only in nature but in the spectacle of a somber movement of nuns through patches of fog that would turn matter into spirit are almost literal restatements of Friedrich's scene of monks in a funeral procession that leads to a ruined Gothic abbey in a wintry oak forest. (pp.131-132)

This may seem a somewhat fanciful claim, a fact which Rosenblum considers, but it serves to show that critics would do well to take this iconography seriously with its pantheistic notions of an equivalence between spiritually directed abstractions and natural form.

3.6 Critical Oversights II: a Defence of Cohesion and Continuity

Although Robert Rosenblum correctly notes that the British artist Graham Sutherland set himself the task of 'translating native Romantic traditions into a more contemporary pictorial idiom' (p.162), he comes close to making a substantial critical oversight when he claims that the artist 'was studying and paraphrasing the art of Samuel Palmer, almost as if, for the moment, the innovations of twentieth-century art had never taken place' (p.162).

Rosenblum would be quite wrong to suppose that the Romantic revival heralded by artists such as Sutherland, Piper and Nash is discontinuous with Modernism, that these artists work on in a tradition quite separate to that which had characterized the abstractions of post-Impressionism. In distinction to such a view, it has been the intention of this study to demonstrate how the sophisticated aesthetic principles of such artists developed *from* the formalistic ideas of their predecessors: how Herbert Read's Romanticism is the full, dialectical completion of an interpretive structure started by

T.E. Hulme. It has been the contention of this chapter that artists such as Piper and Nash went back to the Modernist sources of Hulme and his acolytes and retrieved, with a small measure of brilliance, Romantic implications which had been suppressed.

Thus when Rosenblum claims that the 'Paris-based ideal of art-for-art's sake so fully dominated the mid-twentieth-century view of modern painting that it has taken almost a half-century to realize that the impulses behind the creation of much abstract art were anything but aesthetic in character' (p.173), it must be stressed that this view cannot be applied to mid-twentieth-century Britain. The latter-day critic, whilst understanding the need to salvage an undisputed Romanticism from the historiography of British Modernism, should not confuse this necessity with a lack of theoretical self-consciousness in the artists themselves. Rosenblum's critical coup, his 'discovery' of a modern Northern Romantic tradition, is not a new idea. The artists and critics of the time busied themselves with the same project.

In this respect Rosenblum's assertions are no more helpful than those of Charles Harrison encountered earlier. In both cases the subtle dynamics of theoretical modification tend to become lost in a critical systemization formulated according to one or other of the polar positions implicit in the Modernist dialectic. Harrison adopts a formalist stance which renders John Piper fraudulent and Rosenblum believes so strongly in the idea of a Northern will to form that it does not appear to him as a carefully reworked aspect of the Modernist dialectic – but as indisputable fact.

The cohesion and continuity of the Modernist tradition can be illustrated by allowing the post-Hulme generation its own critical space. It will then be seen that a rigorous awareness of early Modernist theory led to a fluent and self-consciously 'modern' progress forward. Robin Ironside vitiates Rosenblum's claim that abstract conceptions of art 'fully dominated the mid-twentieth-century', illustrating in 1947 the fact that 'the impulses behind the creation of much abstract art were anything but aesthetic in character':

It is the broad truth that British painting since 1939 has accomplished, or almost accomplished, the revival of a liberal conception of the art as a creative instrument for the communication, not simply of those specialised emotions that the felicitous arrangement of forms and colours may arouse in us, but also for the communication by imagery, whether the imaginative vision be naturalistic or not, of any emotion whatever...It would be a mistake to infer that the ideas propagated by Roger Fry and their powerful justification by examples from French painting ever exercised an exclusive influence, or that more mixed, more romantic tendencies than

would have been suffered under that restrictive dispensation alone were not manifest, in whatever comparative isolation, prior to 1939.¹²⁶

These sentiments lend Geoffrey Grigson's comments of 1935 an air of prophecy; Grigson who had proposed his own conception of what British art might comprise after the poverty of Modernist formalism:

Abstract art, then, is not the seed to grow from, but the first floor to build upon. Impressionism, extended, would have meant the supersession of art by life, so Wyndham Lewis declared; purism, 'abstraction-creation,' extended would mean the supersession of art by ideal death. In his 'Elements of Folk Psychology' Wilhelm Wundt describes the way in which the Bakairi of Central Brazil make simple geometrical designs on wood, affective through symmetry and rhythm, and how then they read into these designs 'through imaginative association, the memory images of objects' – snakes, swarms of bees, etc. In these geometrical patterns so interpreted he finds the beginning of formative art. Abstract art at this time needs (but actually and not only in fancy) to be bodied out in such a way; to be penetrated and possessed by a more varied affective and intellectual content. Only so can it answer to the ideological and emotional complexity of the needs of human beings with their enlarged knowledge of the widened country of self.¹²⁷

This is a remarkable declaration which strongly recommends that the abstractions of modern art, in danger of becoming a lifeless idealism, be reclaimed by the affective operations of an imagination swimming with sense-experience. In short, Grigson demands the subjective necessities of empathy, concluding that 'this Home-bred formalism is now as dead as Mr Duncan Grant. English artists must replace it by no incapable tyranny of geometric and mechanical idealism, no permanent escape to the divided rectangle and the spokeless wheel' (p.10). Thus in 1948, in an article which claims to chart the disintegration of 'neo-Romanticism' into a nihilistic anti-humanism 'destructive and not affirmative of life', Geoffrey Grigson yet manages to applaud its differences to preceding schools of formalist thought:

Still, even this self-deception, embodied as it is in something not merely subjective or merely abstract, something as near to the tensivity of the natural world as that natural world disintegrated, may have its merit. The living tree may entice painters to itself, so to speak, since it grows alongside the procumbent, rotting trunk. Yet this new romanticism is a new provincialism. The damage it is now doing increases, naturally, with the potency of those who are leading it; and also

with the extended sealing off of country from country. Still, there are more provincialisms than one. A Parisian provincialism could be – it once threatened to be – as damaging.¹²⁸

Even though Grigson claims that neo-Romanticism had begun to vitiate its humanistic and naturalistic premises – ‘in Sutherland life sinks without tension into the black death of a denatured rock and a sapless claw’ (p.209) – he is still in favour of this declined Romantic idiom in opposition to the austere abstraction it had, in its original glory, set out to revivify: the nationalistic inclinations of this decayed Romanticism are preferable to the international provincialism of Parisian influenced formalism.

Grigson’s comment recalls much of what Wyndham Lewis had stated in 1939, when, ‘at a moment when even the most extreme internationalism is seen to be merging back into nationalism again, what has to be reckoned with more than anything else is this movement of return to what is anchored in the soil, and sunk deep in the past, and away from all that is merely contemporary or *abstract*’.¹²⁹ Lewis details a tendency whereby an aesthetic internationalism is considered to be merging back into nationally orientated or ‘local’ boundaries. It could be said that he identifies the abstraction of early Modernism redefined according to ‘empathic’ organic criteria, in which the whole processed is considered typical of Northern races such as the British:

painting, I had said, would after a time withdraw, would ‘flow back into more natural forms from the barriers of the Abstract.’ For even when most furiously engaged, blasting-tools in hand, upon that granite frontier of the universe of ‘pure form’, I never pretended that such purist exercises were for all men, or for any man for more than a certain period. (p.14)

Like Piper, who had demanded a return to the object, to the ‘tree in the field we are all searching for’, Lewis professed that ‘the more influential artists...must repudiate the journalist, and the self-advertising clown, and return, even noisily, to nature, if so inclined, to romantic nature, without looking back – at once’ (p.52). Indeed, this return to nature would not be a purely retrospective return, an escapist venture ignoring all Modernist developments such as suggested by Rosenblum when referring to Sutherland, but would proceed from those very principles; for, talking of the now demised formalism, Lewis confides – with the tone of one, perhaps, in search of some small consolation for the generality of his earlier follies – that ‘brief as was its reign, its works will stand there behind us to obstruct too abject a return to past successes. It is a snag in the path of those who would sneak back to Impressionism’ (p.23).

These revelations are interesting as they describe a progression from the 'world of pure form' whose centre had been located in Parisian modes of expression; more importantly still, they are statements made by a Modernist artist and writer who had originally lent vociferous support – 'Blessing' as Lewis might once have put it – to the 'Home grown' formalist idiom and whose works had gained the strong approval of, amongst others, T.E. Hulme. Now, he states, 'I survey this stricken field – strewn with cubes and cones, with fearsome masks with billiard balls for eyes, venomous futuristic hat-pins, and bashed-in Catalan guitars – with considerable equanimity' (p.23). Lewis's shift of opinion might be considered to exemplify, on a microcosmic scale, the course of Modernist dynamics in British thought. Thus it is that in 1939 he seeks to assure a new audience that, when blasting away in 1914 and 1915, he had never meant the formalist side of his endeavours to be heralded the whole truth. To this end, with analytical recourse to the third person, he says of himself:

He is (1) a Revolutionary; and (2) a Traditionalist. He is those two things in that order, and not in equal parts. His traditionalism is impregnated with the spirit of his revolutionary alter ego. And so it comes that *his* mother-nature is a super-natural nature. He cannot paint a dead nature (a *nature-morte*) if he tries; for that would be merely a *pattern* – which is not worth while, as he sees it. (p.76)

Lewis describes his art in terms of a dialectical historicism centred around the notion of an increasingly empathic artistic volition, in terms of a dynamic Northern tradition in which tendencies to abstraction and empathy are able to attain an 'ideal reconciliation', and not according to an aesthetic that precludes any such connection but insists instead upon the necessity of complete abstraction.

In *Art Now*, Herbert Read anticipates and lend support to Rosenblum's descriptions of a self-contained Northern expression distinct from Parisian formalism, citing an equivalence between certain tendencies in British art and German Expressionism. Thus, writing on the significance of Edvard Munch, he states:

We might say that he saved German art from a slavish following of the Post-Impressionist school; he returned to a mode of expression more consonant with the nordic genius. Munch's work is therefore of peculiar relevance for us. Much of the feebleness of contemporary British art may be due to an unnatural affectation of Latin elegance and intellectuality – admirable virtues, these, but not the qualities we find, for example, in Gothic art, or in the work of typical northern artists like Dürer, Rembrandt, Rubens or Blake. (pp.84-85)

Munch belonged, according to Read, to 'a movement entirely distinct from the contemporary French movement, but one which ought to be sympathetic to our own Northern temperament' (p.85). Now, although Herbert Read posits a distinction between the abstract modes of post-Impressionism and the empathic or Romantic modes of the North, he quite clearly draws upon dialectical sources provided by Worringer. Herbert Read does not perpetuate a Romantic tradition oblivious to recent developments; on the contrary, by consolidating his reading of Worringer he redirects the entire theoretical locus of British Modernism.

Again, continuing his appreciation of Northern art with reference to the work of Emile Nolde, he claims that 'what is so significant in Nolde's autobiography is the definite reaction he shows to French art. Already in 1898 he is thanking God that he has never been attracted by the French style, that he has not been caught in the net of any Parisian Circe' (p.90). The critical exclusion of Nolde from a Parisian epicentre that would shake anthropomorphic aesthetics with its call of 'art for art's sake' does not go in ignorance of Modernist theory. Indeed, Nolde's art is appraised for its ability to reconcile that which is abstract with that which proceeds from nature. He makes the 'full light and barbaric splendour of the tropics...express his own Northern consciousness, as it was never expressed since the Gothic period (which also, remember, is a compound of extremes, of Eastern exoticism and Northern spirituality)' (p.91). Read's criticism is progressively Modernistic. For him, Nolde's expression offers more than the lifeless conception of 'art for art's sake' without, at the same time, renouncing the spiritual worth of this otherwise debased axiom. It is an art, according to Read, which returns modern aesthetics to its true origins in the synthetic propositions of Hegel and, we might add, 'that is why Nolde takes us back to the Middle Ages for a parallel – to the stained-glass windows of Augsburg and Strasburg, to the coloured wood blocks and illuminated manuscripts of seven or eight centuries ago' (p.91).

3.7 Conclusions?

The lack of genius in English art Nikolaus Pevsner attributes to 'the growing importance in the national character of practical sense, of reason, and also of tolerance. What English character gained of tolerance and fair play, she lost of that fanaticism or at least that intensity which alone can bring forth the very greatest in art'.¹³⁰ Pevsner's historical account of British art charts an increase of all those characteristics associated with humanism. He describes an aesthetic transference in which the aggression of

early spiritual expression is progressively modified by naturalism. Underlying this historical pattern can be discovered a familiar psychological dualism to which Pevsner attributes two particular causes, each dear, as he sees it, to the British heart:

As regards the permanence of certain national traits the most likely way to find them is by starting from two things more than once referred to in the previous chapters: race and climate. Climate is easier to handle, race is a dangerous tool. The ambivalence of any conclusion drawn from race is only too familiar...What it comes down to is that the Celts had a special delight in the spiral curve and the tight intertwining of such curves and that wherever later interlacing, whirls, and intricacy occur they may be traced back to the Celtic component. A fantastic, spiritual, and spirited element may also be called Celtic. The Angles and Saxons and the Normans on the other hand were active, energetic, practical, and devoted to personal freedom, and those qualities also appear often enough later. (pp.196-197)

The climatic significance of a moderate and misty land is reflected directly or indirectly, continues Pevsner, in a correspondingly dualistic mode of artistic representation where 'on the one hand there are moderation, reasonableness, rationalism, observation and conservatism; on the other there are imagination, fantasy, irrationalism' (p.199). Racially, the fantastic, spiritual and disembodied character of the Celtic peoples contrasts with the practical, real-world inclinations of the Angles, Saxons and the Normans. The endemic abstractions of the world-wary Celts are humanized by the empathic epistemology of the later settlers.

Given that this racial structure explains for Pevsner the characteristics of a British will to form increasingly losing its abstract fanaticism and intensity, it is interesting to note the remark of Simon Heffer that 'two days with Enoch Powell looking at churches leave one in no doubt that there are encoded messages, hinting, in his words, "at something unique to the English people, to their history, their Englishness"'.¹³¹ It is easy to call into question the statement that 'those who know Mr Powell only for his political activities may find it hard to picture him travelling around England examining old churches with such relish and expertise as he does' (p.1), when it is learned that, armed with his Pevsner's *Buildings of England*, Mr Powell seeks the Saxon essence of churches 'vandalised' by the unwanted Norman immigrants of 1066: 'I am nagged by a feeling of a whole earlier tradition of a whole earlier tradition submerged under a Norman layer' (p.1). Is it possible that Powell, in his pursuit of architectural origins eclipsed by the superimpositions of the Normans, seeks out the unadulterated fanaticism given by Pevsner as the motivation of an art once great?

Included in the article is a reference to a speech made by Powell to the Society of St George in 1964:

Backward travels our gaze, beyond the grenadiers and the philosophers of the 18th century, beyond the pikemen and the preachers of the 17th, back through the brash adventurous days of the first Elizabeth and the hard materialism of the Tudors, and there at last we find them, or seem to find them, in many a village church, beneath the tall tracery of a perpendicular east window and the coffered ceiling of the chantry chapel. From brass and stone, from line and effigy, their eyes look out at us, and we gaze into them, as if we would win some answer from their inscrutable silence. (p.1)

A purity of race discovered within, and given expression by, the sanctified syntax of an indigenous will to form to be protected from the onslaughts of the continental enemy. Powell divulges that: 'My approach to a building is a piece with my approach to a text. The inconsistencies in a building, like the inconsistencies in a text, raise questions. The questions unlock doors' (p.1). What must be considered, in Powell's case, is the precise nature of these revelations. His insistence upon the reclamation of primal volitions is a declamation of moderation; it throws us back to idealized abstractions not yet modified by a feeling for life, not yet close to the highest form of Northern expression with its link forward to the humanism of the Renaissance. It is hard to envisage Powell, for instance, commending the naturalistic harmony of Southwell without submitting the florid ornament to a scrutiny that might reveal, perhaps, traces of a once purer abstraction – the uncompromising, geometric art of an insular England. Enoch Powell returns us to origins, and in this he recalls all the other artists to which attention has been given. But whereas artists such as Nash and Piper return us to the Northern paradigms of Hegel and Worringer in order to escape from the Modernist idea of abstraction – to move forward again – Enoch Powell utilizes the same race-Romanticism, we suspect, to take us back to those repudiated hieratic forms.

Enoch Powell serves to show that the principles behind the aesthetic consciousness of the British are still, perhaps, Romantic, dialectical and dynamic: that they are able to swing between moderation and violence, naturalism and abstraction, humanism and religion, immanence and transcendence. This chapter has shown the mid-century swing from a position of lifeless abstractionism advocated by Hulme to a new anthropomorphic or naturalistic art. It might be argued that in our 'post-modern' climate the strictures of the Modernist dialectic have been escaped. But we may conclude this chapter by asking again, along with Worringer, 'whether, in some...new

investigation, penetrating to the inmost secret cells of the phenomena of style, much Northern classicism of recent times may not after all reveal itself as merely Gothic in disguise?' ?¹³²



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 15



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

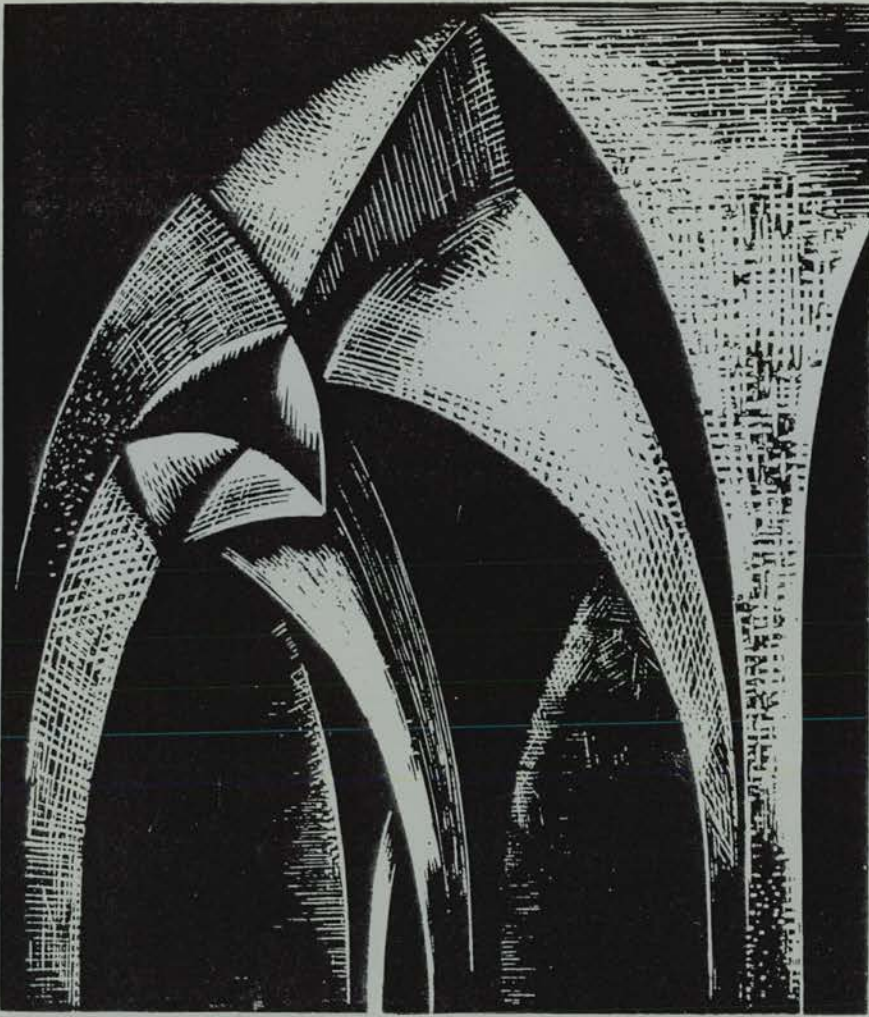


Fig. 7

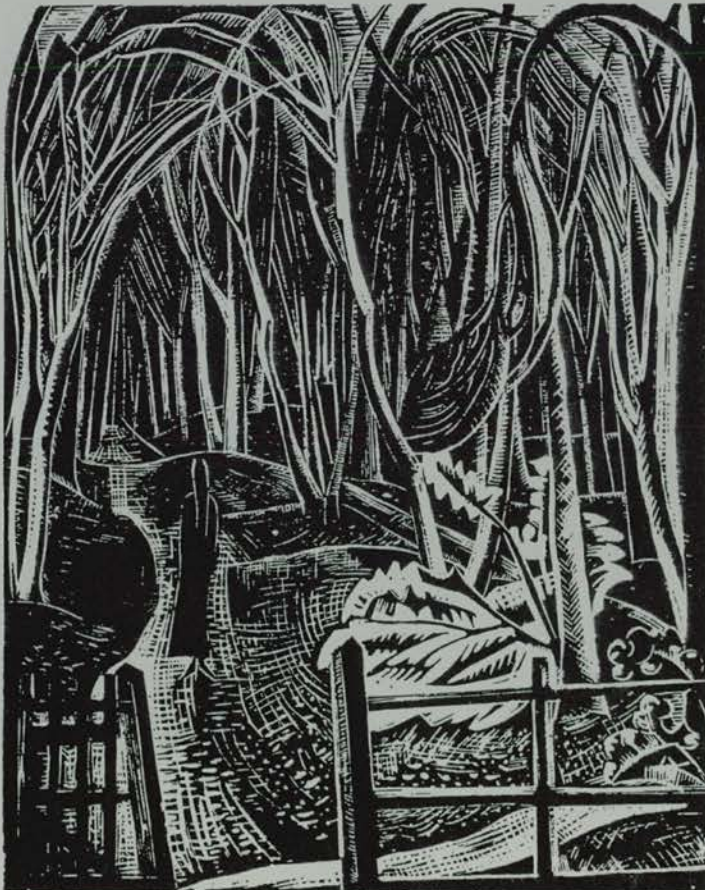
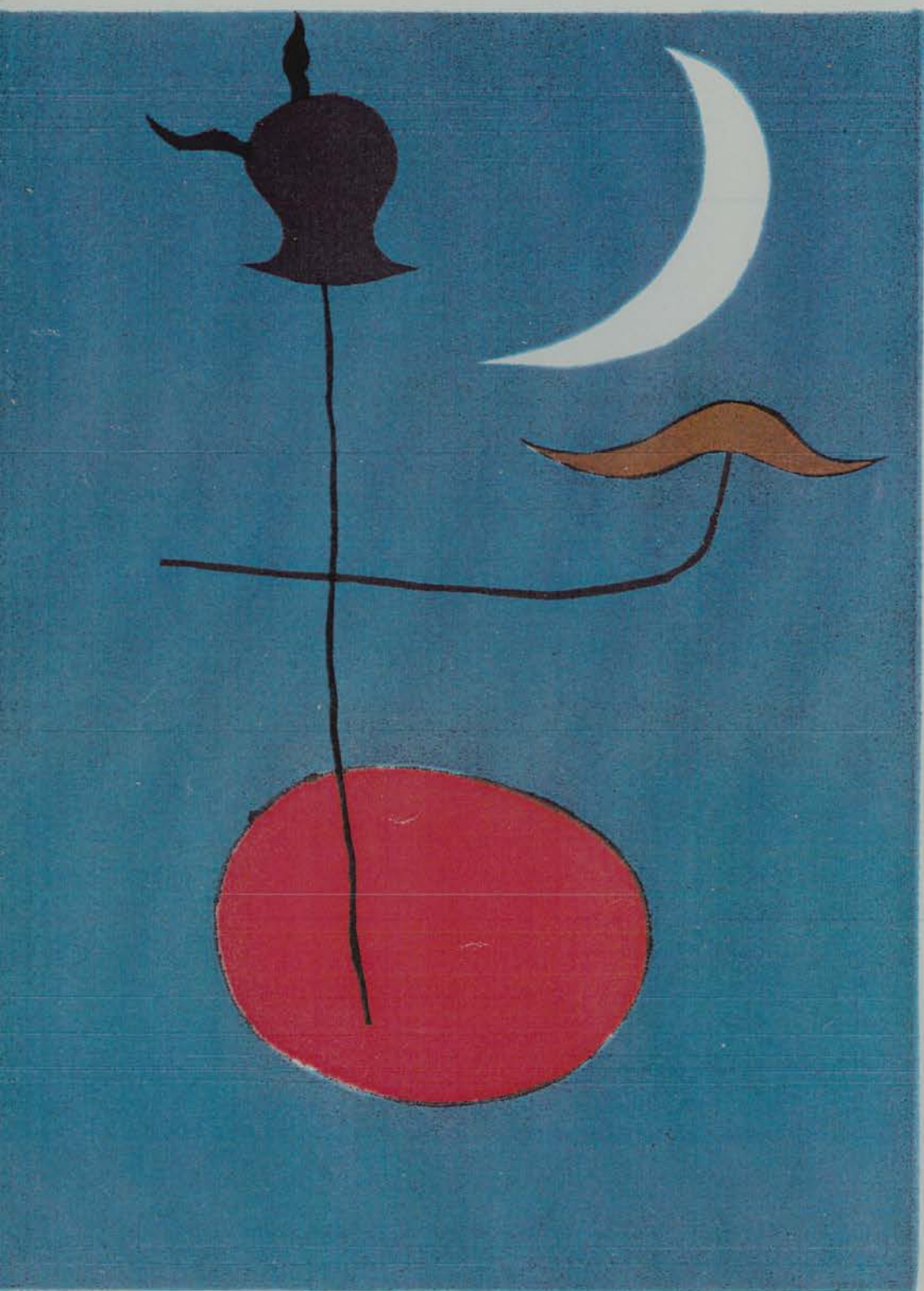


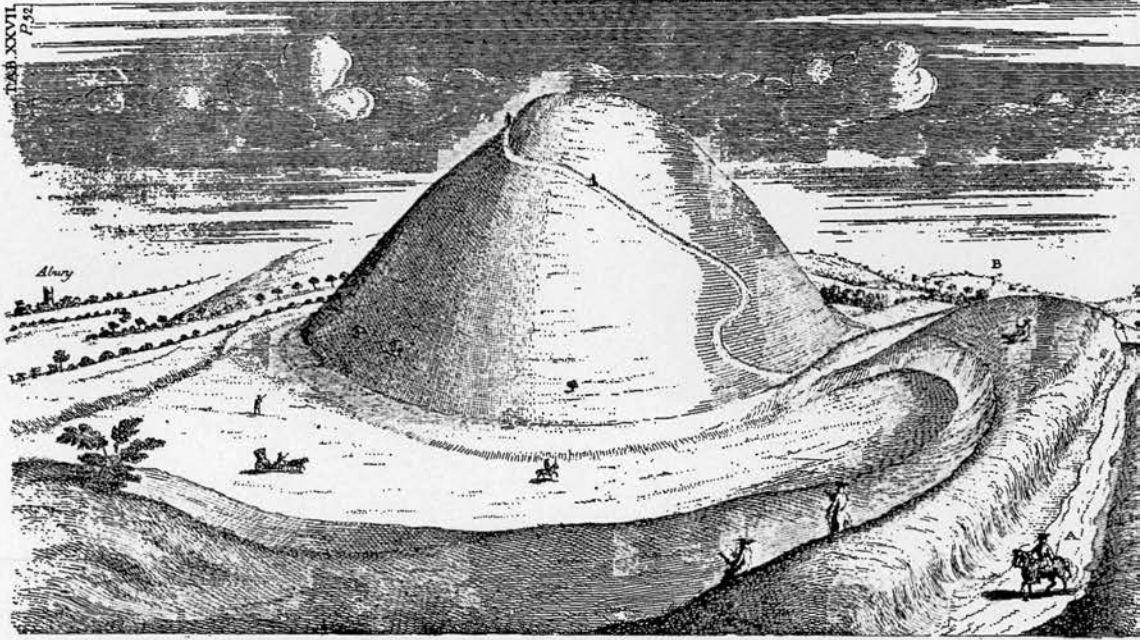
Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Silbury Hill July 11. 1723.



A. The Roman road. B. the Snakes head or hakpen.



Silbury Hill, Avebury, Wiltshire. (Top) After Wm. Stukeley, 1723. (Bottom) Air photo (Crown copyright reserved).
Opposite: Painting by JOAN MIRO

Fig. 10

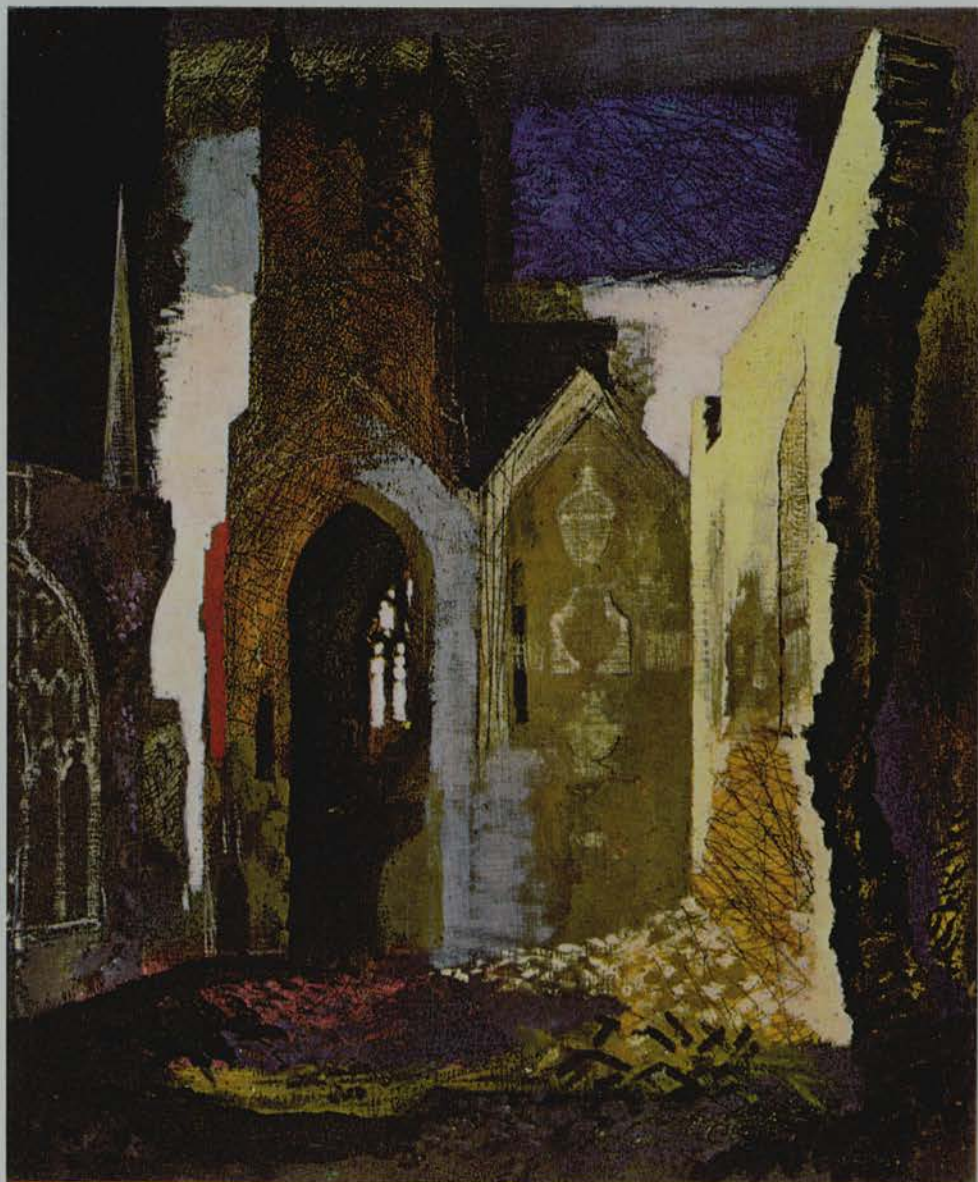


Fig. 11

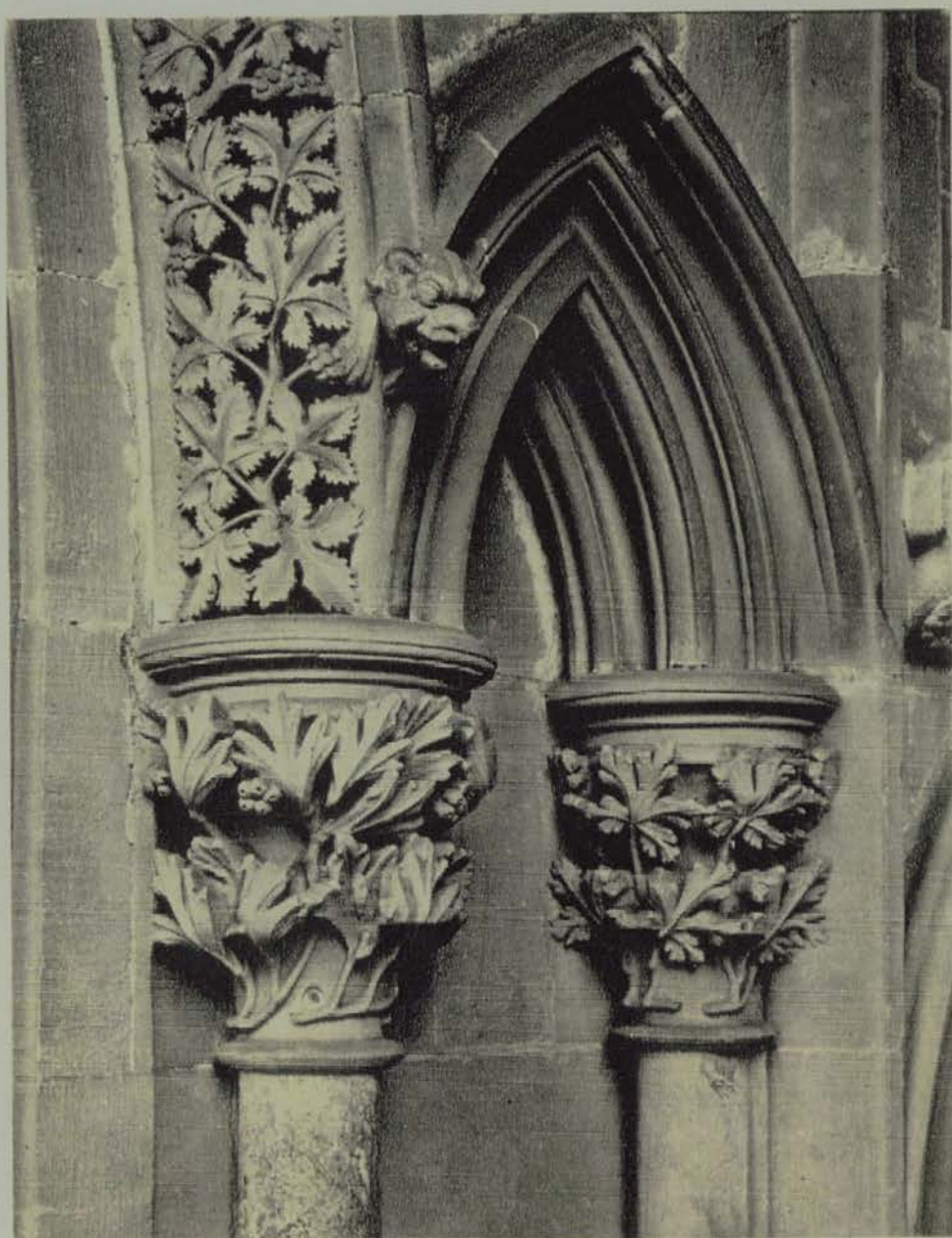


Plate 1

In the ante-room of the Chapter House

Fig. 12



Fig. 13

HIC·IACET·ART
VRVS·QVOND
AM·REX·REXQ
VE·FVTVRVS

HIC·IACET·
ARTVRVS
QVONDA
M·REX·RE
X·QVE·FV
TVRVS

Fig. 14

CHAPTER FOUR

KANTIAN CONFESSIONS OF A NEO-THOMIST: JACQUES MARITAIN AND THE OBJECTIVIST DEBT TO ANTHROPOMORPHIC AESTHETICS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to look at the development of Jacques Maritain's (1882-1973) neo-Thomistic aesthetic in order to further explain the changing nature of Modernist theory in Britain. Commencing in 1923 with a thesis which sought to justify the anti-Romantic tendencies of modern art and literature, Maritain would eventually adopt a position which would call into question the very basis of these theories. Maritain initiates his aesthetic investigations along similar lines to T.E. Hulme, constructing a new religious idealism in the wake of neo-Kantian philosophers such as his old instructor Henri Bergson. The latter, having levelled criticisms at the scientific and rational assumptions of a prevailing tradition of humanism, was not considered by either Hulme or Maritain to have carried his reaction to a satisfactory conclusion: a restoration of principles of faith and a metaphysical explanation of reality. Such was the task which Maritain set himself, arguing for the philosophical and cultural reinstatement of medieval thought, in particular that of St. Thomas Aquinas.

The methodology which Maritain used, however, in order to assert what initially appears to be a reactionary anti-humanism would eventually reveal the Romantic heritage of his philosophy. Building his philosophy of art not, in fact, upon a straightforward reaction to prevailing Romantic dialectics, but upon their neo-Thomistic revision, Maritain would find himself beyond the task of sustaining the rigorous and unequivocal formalism whose delineation had been his primary task. In order to present the thought of St. Thomas, Maritain needed an accessible and contemporary philosophical foundation. As such, he sought to *redefine* subjective aesthetics in the light of Thomistic epistemology rather than to dismiss them outright. But an insistence upon the importance of abstraction and objectivity as sanctioned by the philosophy of Aquinas, coupled with an attempt to demonstrate the same values operative in the fundamentally subjective conclusions of Immanuel Kant and his successors, was an impossibility. Vestiges of Kantian subjectivity haunt all Maritain's proclamations until his debt to the founder of anthropomorphic aesthetics is finally owned. His aesthetic, a

process of continual self-revelation, culminates in a critical celebration of all those subjective and neo-Romantic tenets he had originally endeavoured to suppress in lieu of a transcendental Will-to-Believe philosophy.

This chapter will start with an exposition of Maritain's basic position and draw attention to its central ambiguity. It will then proceed to an explanation of Kant's 'antinomy of taste'. Maritain's interpretation of this same philosophy will then be scrutinized, made as it is with a view to substantiating his objectivist thesis *Art and Scholasticism* (1923). *Creative intuition in Art and Poetry* (1953) will then afford us with a contrast to this first work, demonstrating Maritain's aesthetic change of heart and presenting a critique of T.S. Eliot's objectivist sympathies. A survey of the debate on aesthetics in the *Criterion* of 1927 between exponents of creative intuition on the one hand, and their opposite numbers supportive of an intellectual theory of art on the other, will indicate how the ambiguities of neo-Thomism played themselves out in a critical arena central to British Modernism.

4.2 Maritain's Anti-Humanism

Jacques Maritain's philosophical methodology has a strong affinity with that of T.E. Hulme, his purpose being similarly directed and similarly received. His theories, given their most influential exposition in the work *Art and Scholasticism*, appealed to British Modernists seeking epistemological alternatives to an outmoded tradition of Western humanism signified by, as they saw it, redundant forms of anthropomorphic expression: 'The Renaissance was destined to drive the artist mad and make him the most miserable of men – at the very moment when the world was to become less habitable for him – by revealing to him his own grandeur and letting loose upon him the wild beast Beauty which Faith kept enchanted and led after it obedient, with a gossamer thread for leash.'¹³³ In answer to such an anathematized meliorism, the dogmatic belief in original sin so beloved of Eliot and Hulme is given a philosophical structure by Maritain who proposes the virtues of a medieval aesthetic quite freely and politically reconstructed from original sources:

there are many references in *Art and Scholasticism* to the Middle Ages. They are legitimate, because the Middle Ages are relatively the most *spiritual* period to be found in history and offer us an example very nearly realised – I do not deny the vices and defects – of principles which the author believes to be true. But time is irreversible and the example will serve best as an *analogy*.

The same principles have to be realised to-day, but in an entirely new manner which it is very difficult to foresee (for there are countless possible historic realisations, as different as you like, of the same abstract principle). (p.105)

Jacques Maritain, alert to the fact that 'time is irreversible', was intent upon asserting the contemporary relevance of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas, devoting his philosophical endeavours towards a rewriting of modern aesthetics in which he could conclude as axiomatic the medieval conception that 'art remains entirely by the side of the mind' (p.13). Maritain sought to effect his project not through the dismissal of all modern philosophical systems, but by teasing out of those systems the theological principles he considered to remain implicit in them. What he terms the 'disease of the mind'¹³⁴ inaugurated by the Cartesian reform is considered to be an irregular aberration. He argues, therefore, that all modern philosophical systems deriving from this error are capable of recovery and require help towards such an end. Despite the ramifications of modern agnosticism, in which 'the interior hierarchies of the virtue of reason were shattered' (p.91), Maritain considered it not beyond his capability to reconstruct for the modern mind the metaphysical and teleological awareness proper to it. This it had dismissed under some Kantian delusion for which it might be forgiven, its responsibility clearly diminished:

The mind imagines that it is giving proof of its own native strength by denying and rejecting as science first theology and then metaphysics; by abandoning and attempt to know the primary Cause and immaterial realities; by cultivating a more or less refined doubt which is an outrage both to the perception of the senses and the principles of reason, that is to say the very things on which all our knowledge depends. (p.93)

So it is that in his General introduction to the series of Roman Catholic essays, *Essays in Order*, which precedes the first essay by Maritain on the subject of religion and culture, the British neo-Thomist Christopher Dawson writes disparagingly on the generally anthropomorphic conclusions of the modern age, noting with optimism – and with approving reference to T.E. Hulme – the development of a modern religious sensibility; furthermore, he claims that the new asceticism is formulated not in dismissive reaction to a prevailing tradition of humanism, but is considered to be its logical and natural culmination:

during the present century there has been a general reaction against this idealisation of man. The psychologists have sounded the depths of the human soul and have found nothing there but a little mud. The men of letters have blasted the romantic view of life with ridicule and scorn. The artists have substituted abstract for naturalistic ideals. The physicists have abandoned the naive empiricism of the old scientific materialism for the mathematical abstractions of Relativity. Even the philosophers have begun to desert the tradition of subjectivity and idealism and are returning to realism and ontology.

This philosophical reaction is particularly marked in Germany, so long the stronghold of the opposite tradition. Even the neo-Kantians are retracing their steps and re-interpreting their master in the light of the older traditions of European thought. The philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas is no longer relegated to the limbo of dead systems, and there is a distinct tendency in German thought towards metaphysical and epistemological realism.¹³⁵

Dawson prefaces and supports the very inclinations which Vernon Lee had considered an insidious mental practice: the reinterpretation of Kant and neo-Kantian aesthetics – anthropomorphic and psychological aesthetics – in terms of metaphysical speculation and ontological assertion. Maritain and Dawson's position bears a remarkable similarity to that held by Hulme: namely, that modern philosophical researches all culminate in a pathological realization of their own epistemological limitations and from this hiatus must decide, or be steered, between two choices. The first choice is to believe in the Godless operations of the subconscious which drives matter as an unthinking force: 'restating theology as biology', as Hulme put it when referring to Bergson; the second choice is to resurrect from this pagan subjectivism the virtues of a teleologically, rationally, disposed intellect: 'We are so stupid, St. Thomas approximately teaches, that even provided with the infused virtues, theological and moral, we should certainly miss our salvation if the gifts of that Spirit did not come to the rescue of the feeble government of our reason.'¹³⁶ The former choice – given expression by Bergson and on the side of irrationalism, relativism and subjectivism – would, according to Maritain, result in an entirely heretical attempt to realize a Godless infinite within the bounds of a cognitive apparatus whose claims to infinitude may only properly subserve theological ends; the latter choice, and the one with which Maritain displays obvious sympathy, would herald an absolute, transcendent, spiritual beauty mediated through the intellect by the radiance of the one originating Intellect to which it is necessarily connected. The aesthetic polarities according with these epistemological

positions would lead either to the Romantic excesses of a profligate Surrealism or the sanctified purity of a new formalist idiom.

Thus Maritain cast an aesthetic whose projected aim was to to coerce Kantian definitions of an immediate, intuitive, non-conceptual, non-objective apprehension of artistic form into conformity with Thomistic definitions of an intellectual and metaphysical justification of beauty – such that beauty was a quality removed from all apperceptive and subjective considerations, existing instead as an indisputable scholastic *quidditas* or objective property: as Joyce's Stephen Daedalus phrases it, 'luminously apprehended as selfbounded and selfcontained upon the immeasurable background of space or time which is not it'.¹³⁷ A judgement of beauty certainly should not made according to the purely kinaesthetic criteria associated with empathy for, quoting Joyce again, 'beauty expressed by the artist cannot awaken in us an emotion which is kinetic or a sensation which is purely physical. It awakens, or ought to awaken, or induces, or ought to induce, an esthetic stasis, an ideal pity or an ideal terror' (p.206).

Instead of such heretical attempts to imitate the divine beauties of nature the artist should commit himself to an intellectual perpetuation of the one original spiritual creation, for 'to produce something intellectually, to manufacture an object *rationaly constructed*, is a very considerable achievement in the world: in itself, for man, a way of imitating God'.¹³⁸ Thus, for example, states St. Thomas, 'the architect, by the disposition he knows, Buildeth the structure of stone like a filter in the waters of the Radiance of God, And giveth the whole building its sheen as to a pearl' (p.124). Any artistic structure is built not according to the sensual and emotional interiority of its architect, but is the result of an intellectual operation delegated by the one originating Intellectual force – an operation in which the subject is merely instrumental in divulging a truth greater than himself. As such, art is primarily metaphysical and formal, a transcendent 'habit of the practical intellect' (p.11), and eschews the corporeal, for 'Art is before all intellectual and its activity consists in impressing an idea upon a matter: therefore it resides in the mind of the *artifex*, or, as they say, it is subject in that mind. It is a certain *quality* of that mind' (p.9).

4.3 Maritain's Central Problem

The fact that Maritain's system does not seek a direct refutation of the aesthetic principles given form by Kant and popularized for the twentieth century by the

exponents of empathy theory, gives rise both to its weakness and its strength. With *Art and Scholasticism* he could offer a reading of Kantian epistemology which argued a justification for an anti-Romantic conception of aesthetics. He could take from Kant's dialectical system a definition of form as objective, arguing that the limitation set upon the mind's ability to explain its own indeterminate subjective operations leaves no option but to seek for an explanation to aesthetic response in metaphysics. Such a reading might demonstrate the way in which a credible change of attitude to aesthetics could be effected within a structure of widely accepted contemporary thought. Its overriding weakness, however, is to be discovered in the fact that an apparently discredited subjectivism must always, in actual fact, remain implicit in its considerations. As Wyndham Lewis noted in his *Time and Western Man*:

As far as Maritain personally is concerned, once a bergsonian always a bergsonian. It would be naïf to place too much reliance upon his 'conversion'. He seems to me to be saturated with the lyrical and shoddy impulses of his master, some of his tracts are so effusive that it is impossible to read them without feeling sea-sick: and he seems to me to retain all his old master's hatred of the 'intellect', so that it often seems as though he might perhaps without too conscious a guile have disguised himself as a thomist in order the better to attack it.¹³⁹

Maritain has to suppose the existence of an absolute subjectivity in order to attempt its refutation. It is his position that as the subjective mind increasingly intensifies its relations with the world, the more it will come to recognize its own inability to explain or generate human knowledge of that world, and so the more inclined it will be to posit an external proof of the world. Thus, choosing to accept certain tenets of the Kantian philosophy, Maritain's system must eventually commit itself to an incongruous Pascalian leap of faith (or Will-to-Believe) in order to establish a properly religious alternative:

In order that there should grow unceasingly, conforming to its law, the life of the creative spirit, it is necessary that the centre of subjectivity should continuously be deepened to a point where, in suffering the things of the world and those of the soul, it awakens to itself. In following this line of reflections one would doubtlessly be led to ask whether, beyond a certain level, this progress in spirituality can continue without, under one form or another, a religious experience properly so-called that would aid the soul of the poet to quit the surface-levels. Continuing at any price, refusing heroically to renounce the growth of the creative spirit, when such an experience

postulated by the whole being had nevertheless been rendered impossible, wasn't this perhaps the secret of Nietzsche's disaster?¹⁴⁰

Cultivating an endlessly expansive subjectivity whilst accepting an inability to determine such depths must, in the end, lead to the supposition of a higher order of knowledge. Such is Maritain's position regarding the doctrines of German Romanticism. In fact, Nietzsche, precisely opposing such metaphysical readings of Kant, claims that rather than succumbing to this theological proposition (which, he warns, would have been a disaster indeed), the non-rational German 'cult of feeling', whose general endeavour had indeed originally been to 'bring into honour older, primitive sensibilities and especially Christianity, the folk-soul, folk-lore, folk-speech, the medieval world, oriental asceticism, the world of India',¹⁴¹ began to embrace a new period of enlightenment. Creative subjectivity, having sunk deeper than the surface levels of human knowledge were able to follow, did not inspire a reactionary faith in traditional metaphysics. Instead, the understanding slowly began to retrieve a core of feeling which had temporarily dazed it, but from whose bounds it had never entirely escaped:

there was *no small danger* involved when, under the appearance of attaining a full and final knowledge of the past, the movement as a whole set knowledge in general below feeling and – in the words Kant employed to designate his own task – 'again paved the way for faith by showing knowledge its limitations'. Let us breathe freely again: the hour of this danger has passed! And strange: it is precisely the spirits the Germans so eloquently conjured up which have in the long run most thwarted the intentions of their conjurers – after appearing for a time as ancillaries of the spirit of obscurantism and reaction, the study of history, understanding of origins and evolutions, empathy for the past, newly aroused passion for feeling and knowledge one day assumed a new nature and now fly on the broadest wings above and beyond their former conjurers as new and stronger genii of *that very Enlightenment* against which they were first conjured up. This Enlightenment we must now carry further forward: let us not worry about the 'great revolution' and the 'great reaction' against it which have taken place – they are no more than the sporting of waves in comparison with the truly great flood which bears us along! (pp.117-118)

Nietzsche's reading of subjective aesthetics undercuts the philosophical direction ascribed to it by Maritain and Dawson. Rather than adopt, for the peace of an embattled reason, the notion of an abstractly existing realm which would allow us to explain the art object as a 'thing-in-itself', this German tradition would take renewed confidence in

the mind's own creative, empathic capacity: 'We have thought the matter over and finally decided that there is nothing good, nothing beautiful, nothing sublime, nothing evil in itself, but that there are states of soul in which we impose such words upon things external to and within us. We have again *taken back* the predicates of things, or at least remembered that it was we who *lent* them to them' (p.133).

In 1927 Wilhelm Worringer wrote an article for the *Monthly Criterion* which returns us again to an approximation Nietzsche's conclusion, disproving Maritain's thesis that an adherence to the principle of absolute subjectivity would inevitably result in the search for some sort of metaphysical support, that the Kantian philosophy 'paved the way for faith by showing knowledge its limitations'. Speaking of early, primitive forms of expression whose abstractions signified a reaching out towards an unconditioned transcendent spirituality, he ventures the impossibility, for the modern protagonist, of reproducing such an art:

Our creative sensuous perception – and I will stress this point, for herein lies the positive side of so many negative statements – has transferred itself to quite another channel and become sublimated: it has flowed into our intellectuality in order thence to become mind. The transition period of a sterile intellectuality, which we appear to have won through, was perhaps necessary in order to produce creative intellect. Intellect not in the colourless sense, but nourished with the blood of the whole creative sensuous perception of the time. In short, mind as art, as the most vital and most sensuous organ of our existence.¹⁴²

Instead of Maritain's envisaged 'religious experience' in which the mind, baffled by its inexplicable subjective relations to 'unceasing' depth, 'helps the soul of the poet to quit the surface levels' by providing an intellectual, teleological explanation of form, Worringer speaks of a sublimation of 'creative sensuous perception' – mind becomes apperceptive and reads the world around it according to its sensuously known creative operations. Mind does not correspond with external realities on a conceptual level – that results in the atrophy of its own sensuous and emotional activities; on the contrary, it features in the very contingency of sanguine, subjective being. Therefore, that type of art which had presupposed just the sort of intellectual, religious sanction prescribed for it by Maritain – an abstract art – was to be reclaimed for a mind back in touch with its own sensuous relations:

To art I should like to grant a breathing space, a breathing space in which it can recollect the limits of its vital possibilities. A breathing space, in which it is insured against unjustified and

impossible claims and expectations, and in which it can recover from the assault of metaphysical violence, which it had to endure in the moment of its sublimest expressionistic fragility and refinement. Let us deliver painting from this intellectual high tension and insatiability, in whose sensuous constraint it can answer only with spasms of impotence. Let us restore it at last to its natural climate, a climate no longer laden with forced apocalyptic notions, but tempered by the recognition of the necessity for modesty. (p.116)

Worringer exemplifies this renewed humanism with reference to trends in European art contemporaneous with his article; trends focusing on a Modernist feeling for the local, the figurative and the naturalistic in opposition to a previous emphasis on pure form – in short, focusing on a return to a type of sensual Hellenistic anthropomorphism so discredited by opponents of the ‘Renaissance attitude’: ‘The elegiac classicism with a tinge of Nazareth which is undeniably coming into being in post-expressionist Europe, is to some extent the result of the state of affairs I have explained. It already betrays the desire of art to rest from the significant in the beautiful, to escape from the problematical into what has long been known and never denied’ (p.117). ‘Tinges of Nazareth’, intimations of sublimity, are revealed through an art whose emphasis is upon beauty and humanity and not, as in earlier modes of Modernist expression, by means of ‘problematical’ primitive abstractions or analogies with the geometric purity and the religious significance of, for example, Byzantine iconography and artifice.¹⁴³

The final and most significant irony of Maritain’s position can be revealed. Having argued vociferously for a reading of Kant which supports a neo-Thomistic conception of form as objective, he effects a philosophical *volte-face* in which he gives primacy to subjectivity in all aesthetic equations. Maritain is able to do this for the precisely the same reason that rendered his first position so untenable: the ambiguity of his original thesis, constructed as it is upon the tenets of a fundamentally subjective system, might easily be slewed around in order to give definition to a new anthropomorphic aesthetic. The reasons for this change have already been implicitly referred to. Wilhelm Worringer’s plaint that art be allowed a breathing space ‘in which it can recover from the assault of metaphysical violence’ speaks on behalf of those aesthetic systems which could never support the hyper-ascetic interpretations drawn from them by people such as Hulme and Maritain. Maritain heeds this call, and the evidence can be found in his work *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* which, published some thirty years after the first translation of *Art and Scholasticism*, serves to exemplify a marked turn around in the philosophy of Modernism.

4.4 Kant's Critique of Judgement

Romantic artists and writers (such as those reacting to the theories of T.E. Hulme) sought a sense of divinity reached not through an externalized idealism, but through the sensible medium of the human subject: abstractions mediated empathically or intuitively, immanently rather than transcendently. Kant's definition of the aesthetic judgement presented them with the theoretical basis of such an operation, describing the way in which a subjective appreciation of aesthetic form attains a universal significance through the mystical procedures of a mind both sensibly and conceptually (empathically and abstractly) arranged. We can refer to Hegel's critique of Kant in order to properly introduce the idea:

Now what we find in all these Kantian propositions is an inseparability of what in all other cases is presupposed in our consciousness as distinct. This cleavage finds itself cancelled in the beautiful, where universal and particular, end and means, concept and object, perfectly interpenetrate one another. Thus Kant sees the beauty of *art* after all as a correspondence in which the particular itself accords with the concept. Particulars as such are *prima facie* accidental, alike to one another and to the universal; and precisely this accidental element – sense, feeling, emotion, inclination – is now not simply, in the beauty of art, *subsumed* under universal categories of the Understanding, and *dominated* by the concept of freedom in its abstract universality, but is so bound up with the universal that it is inwardly and absolutely adequate to it. Therefore thought is incarnate in the beauty of art, and the material is not determined by thought externally, but exists freely on its own account – in that the natural, the sensuous, the heart, etc., have in themselves proportion, purpose, and harmony; and intuition and feeling are elevated to spiritual universality, just as thought not only renounces its hostility to nature but is enlivened thereby; feeling, pleasure, and enjoyment are justified and sanctified; so that nature and freedom, sense and concept, find their right and satisfaction all in one.¹⁴⁴

If objective knowledge of the world or its forms – natural or artistic – was to be discovered, then some metaphysical premise was required to provide a universalized measure of truth; but such a premise could itself only fall within the boundaries of a world subjectively determined. This apparent contradiction is 'resolved' when it is learnt that the mind is structured around a coexistence of the faculties of sensibility and understanding. The former deals with the world intuitively and subjectively apprehended without intellectual reflection, while the second shapes those intuitions

with *a priori* concepts which exist universally as functions of the reason and thus lend objectivity or form to the intuitively apprehended content.

Although these two faculties are distinct, a judgement on the world is made possible only when these same faculties attain a synthesis. Such a synthesis is itself transcendent and beyond empirical analysis: the mind cannot refer to its own operations, it can only feel them to be happening. Furthermore, the mind recognizes an arcane harmony between its own rational (and therefore purposive) configuration and the structure of the world it reflects upon and whose order itself suggests a final end of nature. In this way the mind, through its sensible, immediate and pleasurable apprehension of the world, gains an intimation of divinity which is otherwise beyond cognition and, as such, is able to suppose the objective existence of matter without ever determining such objectivity by means of purely rational proofs:

Susceptibility to pleasure arising from reflection on the forms of things (whether of nature or of art) betokens...not only a finality on the part of Objects in their relation to the reflective judgement in the Subject, in accordance with the concept of nature, but also, conversely, a finality on the part of the Subject, answering to the concept of freedom, in respect of the form, or even formlessness, of objects. The result is that the aesthetic judgement refers not merely, as a judgement of taste, to the beautiful, but also, as springing from a higher intellectual feeling, to the *sublime*.¹⁴⁵

This correspondence – between the structure of the mind and the structure of the world – raises a fundamental question which provides an endlessly reciprocating correlative to the inscrutably synthetic nature of the mind itself: does the mind perceive itself on the analogy of an autonomously existing world (the intellectual analogue of an Intellectual archetype), or is the world itself an intuition, a purely subjective, apperceptive, elaboration of the mind's experience of itself?

Kant's aesthetic is organized around what the author terms an 'antinomy of taste'. This is demonstrated by the philosopher using the following scheme:

1. *Thesis*. The judgement of taste is not based upon concepts; for, if it were, it would be open to dispute (decision by means of proofs).
2. *Antithesis*. The judgement of taste is based on concepts; for otherwise, despite diversity of judgement, there could be no room even for contention in the matter (a claim to the necessary agreement of others with this judgement). (p.206)

Kant claims that an aesthetic response is purely subjective in nature and is not referred to by any concept. He justifies this line of argument by citing the commonplace proposition that *'every one has his own taste'* (p.205), this in turn meaning that such a particular aesthetic response is determined by immediate personal experiences such as *'gratification or pain'* (p.205). Implicit in this proposition is the notion that no absolute decision can be arrived at concerning an objective quality of beauty: taste is irreducible to definite concepts and as such no *'proofs'* of beauty can be established – *'there is no disputing about taste'* (p.205). However, this does not preclude the possibility that *'there may be contention about taste'* (p.205) – which is Kant's third commonplace and justifies his ability to formulate the second antithetical proposition of the antinomy. The fact that there may be contention about taste suggests that although no hard and fast concepts as grounds of the aesthetic judgement are involved in order to reach a definite proof of beauty (as would be deployed in a dispute), yet there must exist some objective criteria from which the contention arises. If there can be a contention about the beauty of an object then there must be, according to Kant, at least some *'hope of coming to terms'* (p.205). Therefore, a judgement of taste suggests itself as more than an entirely personal experience (which would see no grounds for attempting to arrive at a consensus of opinion). Indeed, the contemplating subject believes that he has a right to demand the agreement of everyone as to the beauty of an object – despite the proposition that beauty as an object of universal delight cannot depend upon a reference to concepts. Furthermore, Kant sees aesthetic contemplation removed or abstracted from all empirical interests of the observer who

can find as reason for his delight no personal conditions to which his own subjective self might alone be party. Hence he must regard it as resting on what he may also presuppose in every other person; and therefore he must believe that he has reason for demanding a similar delight from every one. Accordingly he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a quality of the object and the judgement logical (forming a cognition of the Object by concepts of it). (p.51)

Yet concepts cannot be involved, for from concepts are derived none of the immediate feelings of gratification or pain which are indeed apparent in the aesthetic judgement: *'The result is that the judgement of taste, with its attendant consciousness of detachment from all interest, must involve a claim to validity for all men, and must do so apart from universality attached to Objects, i.e. there must be coupled with it a claim to subjective universality'* (p.51).

Kant attempts to resolve this antinomy by positing that although the aesthetic judgement involves a reference to concepts, which being *a priori* rational categories are common to all men, those concepts are either indeterminate or, if determinate, are not applied to the object in question. Thus the thing perceived may be said to possess an objective value in so far as it holds some correspondence with a universal *a priori* faculty of the mind, which itself is structured purposively and related to an idea of the divine, but the appraisal of that object still remains unique and subjective owing to the fact that the nature of the *a priori* categories involved in the judgement are themselves of a special type not ordered towards theoretical determination: 'The judgement of taste must have reference to some concept or other, as otherwise it would be absolutely impossible for it to lay claim to necessary validity for every one. Yet it need not on that account be provable from a concept. For a concept may be either determinable, or else at once intrinsically undetermined and indeterminable' (p.206).

Kant talks of a special faculty of the mind, the imagination, which although normally associated with the penetration of intuitions by concepts, behaves in a very different way where an aesthetic judgement is concerned. Kant terms the faculty of taste a '*sensus communis*' (p.153) or 'public sense' (p.153) in opposition to ideas of purely abstract and intellectual judgement: 'We might even define taste as the faculty of estimating what makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept' (p.153). What allows for this non-conceptual, universally communicable, commonsensical definition of taste is an imagination which functions in a 'free play' capacity – mediating between intuitions and concepts not in a determinate and lawfully structured way, generating definite thoughts and objective proofs, but in an entirely nebulous manner, producing inscrutable but intellectually related emotional responses:

The aptitude of men for communicating their thoughts requires, also, a relation between the imagination and the understanding, in order to connect intuitions with concepts, and concepts, in turn, with intuitions, which both unite in cognition. But there the agreement of both mental powers is *according to law*, and under the constraint of definite concepts. Only when the imagination in its freedom stirs the understanding, and the understanding apart from concepts puts the imagination into regular play, does the representation communicate itself not as thought, but as an internal feeling of a final state of the mind. (pp.153-154)

From this premise Kant argues that taste is 'the faculty of forming an *a priori* estimate of the communicability of the feelings that, without the mediation of a concept, are

connected with a given representation' (p.154). The imagination does not directly apply concepts to intuitions sensually perceived and this is why we are able to experience an immediate and subjective response to the beauty of an object. As Hegel puts it: 'Kant interprets the *aesthetic* judgement as proceeding neither from the Understanding as such, as the capacity for concepts, nor from sensuous intuition and its manifold variety as such, but from the free play of Understanding and imagination. In this concord of the faculties of knowledge, the object becomes related to the subject and his feeling of pleasure and complacency.'¹⁴⁶ For Kant, then, the judgement of taste depends not upon a concept applied from a point beyond our human experience, but upon a communally owned and indeterminate concept which constitutes what he calls a 'supersensible substrate of humanity' (p.208): 'The judgement of taste is not based on *determinate* concepts; but the antithesis: the judgement of taste does rest upon a concept, although an *indeterminate* one, (that, namely, of the supersensible substrate of phenomena)' (p.208). Kant concludes that the aesthetic judgement, which allows both a subjective and objective assessment of form, can therefore only be explained with reference to an inexplicable internalized metaphysic:

Beyond removing this conflict between the claims and counter-claims of taste we can do nothing. To supply a determinate objective principle of taste in accordance with which its judgements might be derived, tested, and proved, is an absolute impossibility, for then it would not be a judgement of taste. The subjective principle – that is to say, the indeterminate idea of the supersensible within us – can only be indicated as the unique key to the riddle of this faculty [of taste], itself concealed from us in its sources; and there is no means of making it any more intelligible. (pp.208-209)

4.5 Kant's Central Problem

Kant's antinomy does not present itself in terms which are philosophically clear to the reader. Indeed, Kant argues that the very nature of the ideas dealt with precludes the ability of the intellect to properly understand them – which in itself represents an indeterminate proof of his theory! He says that 'the solution of an antinomy turns solely on the possibility of two apparently conflicting propositions not being in fact contradictory, but rather being capable of consisting together, although the explanation of the possibility of their concept transcends our faculties of cognition' (p.208).

Reason, having argued away purely conceptual explanations of the world, assigns to its own intuitive operations a central status. By the same token it discovers itself inadequate to the task of self-explanation, and thus can only suppose a 'supersensible substrate', impenetrable to knowledge, which affords the opportunity for making indeterminate yet objective judgements on the world. Reason, intent upon knowing absolutely the object of its research, constantly attempts to transcend the boundaries of its organically delimited experience but, conscious of these strictures, remains unable to do so. In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* Kant had claimed that 'metaphysics, in its fundamental features, perhaps more than any other science, is placed in us by nature itself and cannot be considered the product of an arbitrary choice, or a casual enlargement in the progress of experience, from which it is quite disparate'.¹⁴⁷ Metaphysics, confined within the limitations of reason – 'placed in us by nature itself' – is no longer able to offer an externalized, Aristotelian perspective on the world. The conceptual realm is locked away in subjectivity and therefore, although objective realities are *felt* to exist, no proofs may be afforded of their existence. Hegel's major criticism of Kant is levelled at this inscrutable epistemology:

Having accepted this fixity of opposition recognized by the thinking of the Understanding, he was left with no alternative but to express the unity purely in the form of subjective Ideas of Reason, for which no adequate reality could be demonstrated, and therefore as postulates, which indeed are to be deduced from the practical reason, but whose essential inner character remained unknowable by thinking and whose practical fulfilment remained a mere ought steadily deferred to infinity. And so Kant had indeed brought the reconciled contradiction before our minds, but yet could neither develop its true essence scientifically nor demonstrate it as what is truly and alone actual. It is true that Kant did press on still further in so far as he found the required unity in what he called the *intuitive understanding*; but even here he stopped again at the opposition of the subjective to objectivity, so that while he does affirm the abstract dissolution of the opposition between concept and reality, universal and particular, understanding and sense, and therefore the Idea, he makes this dissolution and reconciliation itself into a purely *subjective* one again, not one absolutely true and actual.¹⁴⁸

What this paradox leaves us with is a reason under duress. As Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin note with reference to Kant's conception of metaphysics, 'even though it is not possible for us to form a definite idea of what lies beyond experience, reason is never satisfied with what experience has to offer it. Consequently, it postulates without justification that its ideas correspond to something actually existing'.¹⁴⁹ Tempted by an

indeterminate sense of objective reality, reason constantly aspires to the construction of absolutes it can never finally know.

Roger Scruton considers it to be the case that the second part of the *Critique of Judgement*, which deals with teleology, demonstrates the philosopher's 'ultimate sympathy for the standpoint of theology'.¹⁵⁰ In his *Critique of Teleological Judgement* Kant posits a perfect reciprocation between the finality of nature – whose physico-teleological proofs, such as the idea of design, refer to an ultimate end – and the moral teleological structure of the mind which itself furnishes 'the conception of a *unique* Author of the world suitable for a theology' (p.158). At the same time he feels himself able to specify that the purely rational, moral argument is sufficient evidence alone to justify the notion of a super-sensible being, and it is this assertion that must cause Scruton to identify an ultimate sympathy for theological propositions. For, as Kant states,

the physico-teleological argument cannot in fact do anything more than direct reason in its estimate of the source of nature and its contingent but admirable order, which is only known to us through experience, and draw its attention to a cause that acts according to ends and is as such the source of nature – a cause which by the structure of our cognitive faculty we must conceive as intelligent – and in this way make it more susceptible to the influence of the moral proof. (p.154)

The physico-teleological argument substantiates the moral, supremely rational argument but is a fact that Kant describes as 'not antecedently necessary'. No empirical criteria are required to justify the existence of a unique author of the world, simply the self-referential structures of the cognitive faculty itself. This is an ambiguous position, for Kant has made it clear that in the case of an aesthetic judgement, for instance, a sense of sublimity is realized first and foremost precisely as an immediate and non-conceptually *experienced sensation* of the mind:

Both the admiration for beauty and the emotion excited by the profuse variety of ends of nature, which a reflective mind is able to feel prior to any clear representation of an intelligent author of the world, have something about them akin to a *religious* feeling. Hence they seem primarily to act upon the moral feeling (of gratitude and veneration towards the unknown cause) by means of a mode of critical judgement analogous to the moral mode, and therefore to affect the mind by exciting moral ideas. It is then that they inspire that admiration which is fraught with far more interest than mere theoretical observation can produce. (p.159)

The aesthetic judgement concerns the attention of a rational faculty that can never know pure transcendence, but which gives an indeterminate hint of divinity. Super-sensible transcendence is presented to the reason, but only as a *substrate* of humanity: immanent and beyond the excavations of purely theoretical cognition. The aesthetic judgement brings the conception of the divine down to earth (in the same manner that Benedetto Croce, or indeed Worringer, considered the late Middle Ages to have redefined divinity in terms of a mystical presence located in the focus of the human ego). Divinity is first of all subjectively experienced in an intuitive and immediate apprehension of beauty beheld in the art object or natural form.

In order to solve the problem of how Kant believes divinity might be realized apart from physico-teleological (empirical) proofs, we have to refer once again to the *type* of reason that is involved in the determination (or, rather, non-determination) of God. Although it seems that no actual empirical data is required to gain an intimation of the divine, yet the Prime Mover still cannot be gauged according to the prescriptive functions of the conceptualistic intellect. What is possible is an appreciation of divinity by a rational faculty which does not desire to cognize the super-sensible, but rather to intuit its existence on the pattern of a non-theoretical but resonant harmony between the world and the pure reason. The aesthetic judgement is able to generate such a harmony which is linked neither to purely physical causes, nor entirely conceptual postulates:

Hence we are quite unable to cognize what God is by means of any such definite causality. And it is so with all categories. They can have no significance whatever for knowledge theoretically considered, unless they are applied to objects of possible experience.— But I am able to form a notion even of a supersensible being on the analogy of an understanding – nay must do so when I look to certain other considerations – without, however, thereby desiring to cognize it theoretically. (pp.162-163)

Whether Immanuel Kant discovered in his *Third Critique* a sympathy for theology or not – ultimately his thesis turns upon the impossibility of attaining a conclusion one way or the other – it is apparent that his system provides a philosophical arena within which two entirely contrary approaches to aesthetics can declare their oppositions and seek their reconciliations. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Maritain, whose philosophy of art entertains both approaches within its own shifting definitions. By looking at his work in detail it can be seen how an early predilection for objectivism and theological assertion emerges finally as an aesthetic giving precedence to the 'creative intuition'.

4.6 Art and Scholasticism: Objectivity

The idea that in matters of aesthetic judgement the reason performs synthetic tasks which are beyond its own measure of comprehension – that, in effect, the seat of metaphysics is removed from its abstract external realm into an equally opaque internal location – provides easy prey for theological apologists. Nobody demonstrates this more clearly than Jacques Maritain who argues that ‘the mind, despite the manifold defects peculiar to our species, strives to engender in us, is anxious to produce, not only the inner Word, the idea remaining inside us, but a work at once material and spiritual, like ourselves, with something of our soul over and above’.¹⁵¹ It might be argued that Worringer’s historiographic method (fully quoted in Chapter Two), which claims that ‘an extension of the field of knowledge is not possible in practise, but only by virtue of an ideal auxiliary construction of purely antithetical application’, belongs to the same discourse.

But whereas Worringer’s thesis noted that in the final analysis all cravings towards abstraction are reducible to the sensuous and subjective parameters of the mind, this is not a position that Maritain is willing to accept in his early work. He says of Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* that ‘unfortunately the direct, interesting, and occasionally profound, observations much more frequently met with in that *Critique* than in the other two are vitiated and distorted by his mania for system and harmony, and above all by the fundamental errors and the subjectivism of his theory of knowledge’ (p.161, n.55). Maritain therefore sets about attempting to redefine the Kantian system as one in which primacy is given to the intellect, arguing not that the Kantian philosophy is useless, but that the otherwise profound epistemological observations of his thought are spoiled by a rigorous adherence to a fundamental subjectivism:

One definition he gives of the beautiful calls for an attentive examination. ‘The beautiful,’ says Kant, ‘is what gives pleasure universally *without a concept*.’ Such a definition, taken by itself, runs the risk of causing the essential relation of which beauty informs the intelligence to be forgotten. So in the case of Schopenhauer and his disciples it blossomed into an anti-intellectualist apotheosis of Music. Nevertheless, it recalls in its way the much more exact expression of St. Thomas, *id quod visum placet*, what gives pleasure *being seen*, that is to say *being the object of an intuition*. (p.161, n.55)

According to Maritain's reading of St. Thomas,

the mind is, *by means of the intuition of the senses, itself* confronted with a glittering intelligibility (derived, like every intelligibility, in the last analysis from the first intelligibility of the divine Ideas), which by the very fact that it produces the joy of the beautiful cannot be detached or separated from its matrix of the senses and consequently fails to procure an intellectual knowledge susceptible in practice of expression in a concept. (p.162, n.55)

This description of an '*intellectualised sense*' (p.162, n.55), in which a divine intelligibility is presented non-conceptually through objects via an intuitive faculty of the mind, has an ostensive affinity with Kant's idea that a judgement of taste may be *a priori* objective – claiming the involvement of concepts, however indeterminate they may be.

On closer appraisal, however, it can be seen that despite the initial similarity of these positions Maritain *presupposes* the existence of an absolute external intelligibility, whereas in Kant's system this is only an intimation gleaned according to the purely subjective, apperceptive activities of a mind delimited by experience. Maritain allows no room for the idea that divinity might be *construed* on the analogy of the operations of the cognitive faculties: any analogy to be drawn between the operation of the mind involved in a judgement of taste and sublime truth may only be made after the penetration of the mind by an external intelligence. In Maritain's thesis, although 'the mind has no thought – unless secondarily and reflexively – of abstracting from the sensible particular' (p.162, n.55), that sensible particular itself presents to the mind a divine intelligibility without allowing the mind to generate any such conclusions itself: 'This seizure of an intelligible reality immediately "sensible to the heart," without resorting to the concept as a formal means, creates, upon an entirely different plane and by an entirely different psychological process, a remote analogy between the aesthetic emotion and the mystic graces' (p.163, n.55). Maritain's aesthetic may appropriate the Kantian notion of a non-conceptual *apprehension* of form, but there can be no allowance for the notion of a non-conceptual *apperception* of form: beauty as a quality that can only be known according to the experience of the subject, however much it may be suggestive of transcendental truths.

Maritain's conception of the aesthetic emotion does not suggest the grounds for transcendental deductions as suggested in Kant's propositions, but is merely the result and confirmation of a predetermined metaphysical certainty. This is a conclusion that Maritain defends rigorously from more subjectively orientated interpretations of Kant

and his successor Hegel, claiming, for instance, that 'the capital error in Benedetto Croce's neo-Hegelian *Æsthetics* (Croce, too, is a victim of modern subjectivism: "Beauty is not inherent in things...") is the failure to perceive that artistic contemplation, however *intuitive* it may be, is none the less above all *intellectual*. *Æsthetics* ought to be *intellectualist* and *intuitivist* at the same time' (p.163, n.55). Maritain's struggle to phrase two aesthetic projects in one cogent discourse is apparent here. Following a Kantian model, he proposes a simultaneity between the intuition and the intellect in any judgement of taste; but in order to remain loyal to his theological persuasions artistic contemplation must remain 'above all *intellectual*'. Maritain's final sympathy appears to be with the view that beauty can ultimately be considered only as a property of the object – 'an intelligible splendour emanating from the work' – and that the intuition, far from being confined to a subjective realm of non-conceptual experience, is able to invite sublimity down from heaven to earth and reach assured conclusions about the objective quality of the 'thing-in-itself'.

Maritain continues this philosophical anomaly, borrowing from Kant in order to extend his own Thomistic axioms: 'Again it may be observed that Kant is right in considering *emotion* ("the excitement of vital energies") as a *posterior* and *consecutive* fact in the perception of the beautiful. But the first and essential fact for him is the "aesthetic judgement" (in his system its value is wholly subjective); for us it is the intuitive joy of the mind and but secondarily of the senses' (p.165, n.55). The intellect is once again given precedence by Maritain. Kant, he concedes, was correct to dissociate judgements of taste from purely sensual pleasures, but in privileging the idea of an immediate and non-conceptual apprehension of form above the operations of the intellect – whose proper *instrument*, according to Maritain, was the intuition – such conclusions were spoiled. In fact, according to Maritain,

the beautiful goes straight to the heart: it is a ray of intelligibility attaining it undeviatingly and sometimes bringing tears to the eyes. And this joy is doubtless a 'feeling'... Nevertheless there it is a question of a very special feeling, *depending simply upon knowledge*, and the happy fullness procured to the mind by a sensible intuition. Emotion in the ordinary meaning of the word, the development of passions and feelings other than this intellectual joy, is merely a result – an absolutely normal result – of that joy: it is as such posterior, if not in time, at all events in the nature of things, to the perception of the beautiful, and remains extrinsic to what formally constitutes the beautiful. (pp.165-166, n.55)

The joy experienced before beauty may be an immediate joy as far as temporal considerations are concerned, but 'in the nature of things', which is in itself a phrase suggestive of indisputable objective realities not subject to the modifications of time and place, it is the formal constitution of beauty which holds precedence: beauty as a divine intelligence stamped upon matter to subsequently inspire emotion. In no way should beauty be considered an emotional construct contingent upon the subjective and empirical qualifications of the here and now:

It is interesting to observe that the subjectivist 'poison' introduced into modern thought by Kant has almost fatally compelled philosophers to seek for the essence of aesthetic perception, in spite of Kant himself, in emotion. So Kantian subjectivism has borne its latest fruit in the *Einfühlung* theory of Lipps and Volkelt, which brings the perception of the beautiful back to a projection or infusion of our emotions and feelings into the object. (p.166, n.55)

According to Maritain, the neo-Kantian empathy theorists had inversely translated the thought of their mentor in terms of an emotive subjectivism which Maritain considered improper to his original conclusions. Maritain's project attempts to justify, through an analysis of (reconstructed) Thomistic epistemology, a new reading of Kant in which objective values are considered to have a primary importance.¹⁵² Therefore, in describing the mind's operations in the face of beauty, Maritain adopts a terminology which is strongly reminiscent of Kant's depiction of a non-determinate intuition:

Firmly fixed in the intuition of sense, it is irradiated by an intelligible light granted to it of a sudden in the very sensible in which it glitters; and it apprehends this light not *sub ratione veri*, but rather *sub ratione delectabilis*, by the happy exercise it procures for it and the succeeding joy in appetite, which leaps out to every good of the soul as its own peculiar object. Only afterwards will it more or less successfully analyse in reflection the causes of such joy. (p.26)

Maritain expands upon this by claiming that 'although the beautiful is in close dependence upon what is metaphysically true, in the sense that every splendour of intelligibility in things pre-supposes some degree of conformity with that Intelligence which is the cause of things, the beautiful nevertheless is not a kind of truth, but a kind of good' (p.26). In this definition it appears that beauty cannot claim for itself the absolute value which might be expected of it in an orthodox Thomistic reading. Beauty is here apprehended in an immediate and pleasurable way which is only referred to by the abstractive intellect after such a subjective reception has passed. Maritain seems to

suggest an apperceptive and creative activity of mind at work here, removed from the dictates of an objective, teleologically ordered intellect which is now only called into play after the fact of aesthetic response. The mind appears to be measuring beauty according to the pleasure it feels in itself and not according to any metaphysical dictates in which 'God makes the will do it in the will's own way, that is to say freely' (pp.133-134).

However, this last axiom – that the will functions freely within the boundaries prescribed for it by an objective authority – is precisely the one which underlies Maritain's overall definition. The irradiation of the mind by an 'intelligible light' 'firmly fixed in the intuition of sense' is not an irradiation which our minds are capable of generating; it is not, in fact, 'firmly fixed in the intuition of sense' – a statement which might lead the reader to believe that he was being presented with Kant's inscrutable and inextricable free-play synthesis of intellectual and intuitive principles – but is quite external to it and hierarchically placed above it:

to create a work of beauty is to create a work resplendent with the glitter or the brilliance, the mystery of a *form*, in the metaphysical sense of the word, a radiance of intelligibility and truth, an irradiation of the primal effulgence. And the artist no doubt perceives this form in the world of creation, whether interior or exterior: he does not discover it complete in the sole contemplation of his creative mind, for he is not, like God, the cause of things. (pp.124-125)

Maritain separates out the component parts of Kant's aesthetic judgement, whilst maintaining the semblance of a subjective philosophy, to commit himself again to a re-phrased formalism. It is realized, once the subjectivist terminology is disengaged from the Thomistic principles it propagands, that beauty is considered to be an abstract and divinely justified quality existing beyond the creative capacities of the subject, shining *through* the intellect and not *from* the intuition; and that whilst 'this very brilliance of form, the essence of beauty, shines on matter in an infinite variety of ways' (p.28), it is certainly not a brilliance that our minds have any claim to, or even experience of, for

by *brilliance of form* must be understood an *ontological* splendour which happens to be revealed to our minds, not a *conceptual* clarity. There must be no misunderstanding here: the words *clarity*, *intelligibility* and *light*, used to characterise the part played by *form* in the heart of things, do not necessarily indicate something clear and intelligible *to us*, but rather something which, although clear and luminous *in itself*, intelligible *in itself*, often remains obscure to our eyes either because of the matter in which the form in question is buried or because of the transcendence of the form

itself in the things of the spirit...It is a Cartesian error to reduce *absolute* brilliance to brilliance for us. (pp.28-29)

For Maritain, every form, being understood as that which is 'the principle determining the peculiar perfection of everything which is, constituting and completing things in their essence and their qualities, the ontological secret, so to speak, of their innermost being, their spiritual essence, their operative mystery' (p.24), is a 'remnant or a ray of the creative Mind impressed upon the heart of the being created' (p.25). All artistic creation must be seen as part of a divinely arranged order channelled through the intellect whose proper tool it is. As such, 'what constitutes the austerity of the truly classical is such a subordination of the matter to the light of the form so manifested as admits into the work no material element from things or the subject except what is absolutely necessary to support or transmit this light and would otherwise dull or "debauch" the eye, the ear or the mind' (p.60). Artistic endeavour attains its importance by virtue of its spirituality and remains, in its purest form, free of corporeal influence: 'Nothing concerns Art but its objects; it has no concern whatever with subjects' (p.84).

It would be easy to continue to catalogue statements such as these which conclude the ardently theological principles behind an apparent receptiveness to modern philosophical ideas; indeed, as claimed before, Maritain is not concerned with a thorough repudiation of the modern philosophical tradition, but with an attempt to dig it out of what he perceives as its own epistemological malaise and to recommit it to principles of faith. What is now needed is an examination of Maritain's judgement on modern art and literature and his opinions on the choices with which such art is presented.

Romantic and materialistic conceptions of art, which had placed man and the exigent conditions of the temporal order at the centre of the creative impulse, were to be replaced with a new humility entailing service to a higher ideal of beauty than that which it is possible to find in any anthropomorphic reading of form: '*Inspiration* is not a mythological accessory only. There is a real inspiration, proceeding not from the Muses, but from the living God, a special impulse of the natural order, whereby the first Mind gives the artist, when it pleases, a creative impulse transcending the limits of reason and employing as it elevates every rational energy of art' (p.69). Hence, like Worringer, Maritain praises the austerity of primitive art noting its affinity with contemporary trends. The apparent technical clumsiness of the primitives should not detract from the idea behind the work, it being 'a sacred weakness revealing the subtle

intellectuality of art' (p.54). Such art provides a welcome panacea to the self-confident excesses of the Renaissance ideology which led to an arrogant imitation of nature instead of a celebration of the divine idea informing creation:

When in an art gallery we leave the rooms of the Primitives for those which display the glories of oil painting and a much more considerable material science, the foot advances over the floor but the soul sinks to the depths. It had been taking the air on the everlasting hills: it is now on the boards of a theatre – a magnificent theatre. In the sixteenth century deceit installed itself in painting, which began to like science for its own sake and to give the *illusion* of nature, to make us believe that in front of a picture we were in front of the landscape or the subject painted, not in front of a picture. (p.54)

This leads Maritain to ask: 'Does cubism in our day, despite its tremendous deficiencies, represent the still stumbling screaming childhood of an art once more *pure*?' (pp.54-55). He confirms retrospectively that 'the Cubist reaction, by recalling painting to the essential requisites of art in general, did, in fact, render the very great service of recalling painting to itself' (p.55). Having made this analogy, Maritain returns us to our most familiar example of an intensely spiritual form, arguing again for the importance of the intellectual volition over and above subjective or material demands: 'Architecture also provides remarkable examples of the primacy accorded by the art of the Middle Ages to the *intellectual and spiritual* construction of the work at the expense of material correctness, in regard to which the technical equipment and the theoretical knowledge of the old builders were inadequate' (p.187, n.108).

Maritain, however, appears to exclude himself from a thesis which proposes the contemporary necessity of an absolute formalism. This would lead to 'an art completely isolated from everything which was not its own peculiar rules of operation and the object to be created as such – in other words, separate and exempt from, and perfectly disinterested in regard to man and things' (p.91). Aware that abstract art taken to its furthest limits excludes the notion of humanity all together, he makes some careful concessions to the idea of art as necessarily involving the living subject, so that, for instance,

when a cubist in a revolt against impressionism or naturism declares that a picture, like a cushion, should be as *beautiful* as ever when turned upside down, his assertion is a very interesting return (very instructive too, if properly understood) to the laws of absolute constructive coherence of *art*

in general; but he leaves out of account both the subjective conditions and the special requisites of what constitutes beauty in *painting*. (p.62)

Maritain admits of his thesis that 'the whole discussion resolves itself into this, that art is faced by an antinomy (it is not alone in such a situation) between the supreme postulates of *its essential being* considered in itself and transcendently, and the *conditions of existence* demanded by this same being as it is realised on this earth' (p.91). Maritain adopts Kantian vocabulary to explain art's crisis: faced by an 'antinomy' which appears impossible to resolve, it attracts the opposing claims of two distinct worlds. One solution proffered is that art, whilst owning its necessary relation to subjectivity, should constantly aspire to the transcendent realms it knows to be out of reach:

To order contemporary art *to exist* as abstract art, discarding every condition determining its existence in the human subject, is to have it arrogate to itself the aseity of God. To require it *to tend* to abstract art like a curve to its asymptote, without rejecting the servitudes of its human estate, but ceaselessly overcoming them, by straining its created bonds to the extreme limit of elasticity, is to require it to realise more fully its radical spirituality. Here is pride, there magnanimity, both aiming at the impossible, either of folly or of heroism. Blinding moment! – when the extremes of sin and virtue come close together and blend, each in that fusion proceeding to its destined place, the weak to the foolhardiness where it is destroyed, the strong to the virtue where it grows stronger. (pp.90-91)

But a further scenario arising from the antinomy presents itself to Maritain. What if modern art or poetry, frustrated in its attempts to justify itself in terms of a theologically inspired intellect, yet still convinced of its absolute status, turns its researches inwards, searches for absolute validation in subjectivity? The culmination of this tendency to internalization is a pathologically Romantic art impelled by an irrational and pagan force which Maritain can only explain by remarking that 'the unconcealed and palpable influence of the devil on an important part of contemporary literature is one of the significant phenomena of the history of our time' (p.108). Maritain, foregoing his momentary concessions to subjectivity and the Kantian synthesis, notes with regard to abstract art that 'its orientation is towards Christ or Antichrist, towards sheer destruction or faith' (p.108). Once again, therefore, it is religion's task to sanctify the heretical inclinations of the modern consciousness and save art from an absolutism which precludes divine authority:

For only in the light of theology can it completely acquire self-knowledge and recover from the false systems of metaphysics which obsess it. By showing us where moral truth and the genuine supernatural are situate, religion saves poetry from the absurdity of believing itself destined to transform ethics and life: saves it from overweening arrogance. But by teaching man to discern immaterial realities and the savour of the spirit, by linking poetry and art itself to God, it protects them against cowardice and self-abandonment, allows them to attain a more exalted and more rigorous idea of their essential spirituality, and to concentrate their inventive activity on the fine point thereof. (p.109)

With recourse to a theological reconditioning of 'false systems of metaphysics' which obsess art we should see 'complete harmony without waste or wavering between submission to the conditions of our human state, on which the virtues operative in the subject depend for their very existence, and the movement towards abstract art, which follows from the very essence of these virtues once they touch beauty' (p.110). The false system of metaphysics of which Maritain mordaciously speaks, having slipped in under the 'feeble government of our reason', is one which attains its expression in the forms of modern psychology, and one to be expelled:

The air we breathe is saturated with spiritual filth and we have returned to the great night of the agony of paganism, when man has to cope not only with his own wretched body but with a body scourged by the angels of Satan, when all nature clothes itself with obscene symbols, a nightmare the obsession of which literary Freudism is everywhere busy multiplying. Would it not be foolhardy in the extreme to try to work in such a world uncontaminated without arming oneself with the strictest rules of ascetic discipline? (p.116)

Maritain proclaims that 'what makes the condition of modern art tragic is that it must be converted to find God again' (p.119), and, quoting respectively Claudel and Apollinaire, describes the necessity of this return in terms of an aesthetic tradition which, having played itself out in various irreligious guises, must finally accept its supplication to the one originating Intellectual force:

Now that so much literature and such an arrogant initial confidence in enfranchised reason and the emancipated self have ended in the rupture manifest in Dadaism or in the free expressions of futurism (that dying breath of the past), it feels that it is its duty to piece together again, to reconcile the faculties of imagination and sensibility with religious knowledge, to recover 'the

whole man in the integral and indissoluble unity of his double nature', the spiritual and the carnal, as in the intricacies of his nature and supernature, his life on earth and the mystery of the operations of Heaven. It foretells 'the time of ardent grace'; like contemplation, it would anticipate Heaven: 'and let everything bear a new name'. (p.121)

Maritain's position at the end of *Art and Scholasticism* seems resolute enough: having passed from an overweening confidence in the operations of the subjectively delimited reason into a period of epistemological uncertainty, it is proposed by the theorist that what is both ethically and aesthetically necessary is a renewed devotion to eternally reliable metaphysical truths. A 'false system of metaphysics', operating indeterminately without referral to concepts within the structures of cognition and giving rise to an art of base emotion justified by the heresies of modern psychology, must have restored to it the external metaphysical certainty of the divine. Literary Freudism and the researches of the *Einfühlung* theorists might have displaced the complacent scientific materialism of a redundant humanism, but they themselves failed to supply a satisfactory alternative. The discovery of this alternative provided Maritain with his purpose when writing *Art and Scholasticism*.

4.7 Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry: Subjectivity

Considering what has been concluded with regard to Maritain's early stance on aesthetics and art-history, it is initially surprising that in his work *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* of 1953, a prosaic development of lectures given in Washington at the National Gallery of Art in 1952, he should write the following:

Nature is a Thing-in-itself for the philosopher, inasmuch as through reason intent on being he attains in nature intelligible objects which transcend sense-experience. But for modern art nature is rather a Thing-in-man, inasmuch as through poetic or creative intuition the artist...grasps in nature the reality of things as resounding in his own emotion and subjectivity...it might be suggested that Kant's prime insight in relation to the theoretical field finds its *locus naturalis* – after complete conceptual recasting – not in philosophy but in empiriological science; and that his prime insight in relation to the practical field finds its *locus naturalis* – after complete conceptual recasting – not in ethics but in art, which reaches transapparent reality not through any 'postulate of practical reason' but through poetic knowledge.¹⁵³

In this work Maritain inverts the emphasis of his previous study. Whereas in 1923 the theorist cannot accept the Kantian thesis of subjectivity without reworking it until all philosophical and aesthetic conclusions subserve theology – intellect gaining primacy over intuition in all poetic and artistic operations – here nature is no longer regarded as a thing existing separately from man, but is an emotional and subjective interiority to be lyrically phrased in poetic creation: Kant's system is now afforded praise and not, as before, disapprobation for its 'empiriological' reclamation of the grounds of knowledge. Maritain's mid-century thesis is an expressive vindication of all those Romantic ideas he had originally considered so dangerous to art. The aesthetic act is no longer regarded as a secondary incarnation of an external divine idea, but proceeds from the very core of the cognitive faculties – the pre-conscious, non-conceptual life of the intellect which Maritain terms the 'creative intuition'. Maritain's aesthetic becomes a trope of the Kantian idea of the 'free play' of the imagination: creative intuition deriving from a mysteriously inspired, although 'intentional', collective unconscious. Borrowing from Kant's terminology, we might locate its origins in the *sensus communis* or 'supersensible substrate of humanity'.

And the thought of the poet, in so far as it is centered on poetic knowledge, escapes to a certain extent the sunlit regime of the logos, and participates to a certain extent in the nocturnal regime of imagination, in which the principle of noncontradiction does not come into force and things are at the same time themselves and another, because their presence in a sign – as known through it – is mistaken for a real and physical presence. Thus the thought of the poet (at least his subconscious thought) resembles somewhat the mental activity of the primitive man, and the ways of magic in the large sense of this word. (p.171)

The poet does not arrive at ontological certainties or resolve experience into absolutes but, avoiding such a process of intellectual abstraction, exists in a non-determined realm in which everything attains a subjective and related significance as if in a dream: 'it is altogether too hasty for us to say that with him there is simply an identity between the sign and the signified. No, there is an oscillation, there is a going and coming from distinction to identification' (p.325, n.2). The poetic consciousness exists, for Maritain, in that state of indescribable magical flux left with the evacuation of rational certainty. Earlier desires to reconstruct the Logos within those uncertainties, to argue for the one original referent which everything else must indubitably signify, have lost their nascent force: 'Metaphysics enjoys its possession [of spirit] only in the retreats of the eternal regions, while poetry finds its own at every crossroad in the wanderings of

the contingent and the singular...Metaphysics gives chase to essences and definitions, poetry to any flash of existence glittering by the way, and any reflection of an invisible order' (p.174). So it is that in the modern poem 'the sovereignty has shifted from the rational connections to the experiential and internal ones' (p.215), and, as for concepts, 'they remain indispensable instruments of meaning, but they are no longer the masters of the work, and in this sense they have all been dethroned; poetic expression does away with their well-off descriptive garrulity, as well as with the necessity of making prevalent their own regime of rational articulation and logical objectivity' (p.223). For Maritain, it is enough to realize

that there exists a deep nonconscious world of activity, for the intellect and the will, from which the acts and fruits of human consciousness and the clear perceptions of the mind emerge, and that the universe of concepts, logical connections, rational discursus and rational deliberation, in which the activity of the intellect takes definite form and shape, is preceded by the hidden workings of an immense and primal preconscious life. Such a life develops in night, but in a night which is translucent and fertile, and resembles that primeval diffused light which was created first, before God made, as the Genesis puts it, 'lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from night' so as to be 'for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years'. (pp.68-69)

The reception of 'a radiance of intelligibility and truth', spoken of in 1923, is here preceded by a generative 'primal' creative intuition, just as the world before God's illumination was preceded by an indeterminable 'diffuse light'. The intuitive faculty of the mind is regarded as truly creative and not, as in *Art and Scholasticism*, a means by which pre-existing intelligibility is perceived: 'Conversely, in connection with aesthetic feeling there is always, to some degree, a sort of invasion of Nature by man...Everywhere, in reality, man is there, under cover. Man's measure is present, though hidden. All these non human things return to man a quality of the human mind which is concealed in them' (p.5). The world is read according to a harmony registered between it and the structure of the mind. The mind discovers itself in the objects of the world, and those objects exist only by virtue of the mind's participation in them. Maritain, following Kant, arrives at an approximate definition of *Einfühlung*.

Here there is, however, a caveat – an essential and perhaps anomalous point we must return to in more detail later. Despite the fact that the aesthetic act is now considered by Maritain to be an absolutely subjective expression of emotion, taking place in a pre-conceptual, pre-conscious realm of the mind, it is a type of *intentional* emotion of which the author speaks. Without an emotion that is ordered *towards*

spirituality, whatever inchoate region it might have come *from*, the artist or man encounters grave problems: 'When man seeking for his own inner universe takes the wrong road, he enters the internal world of the deaf unconscious, while believing he enters the internal world of the spirit, and he thus finds himself wandering in a false kind of self-interiority, where wildness and automatism mimic freedom' (p.69). Although in the perception of aesthetic form 'we receive a participation in the poet's emotion' (p.210), Maritain stresses that we share 'not in his feelings, I mean, but in his spiritualized and intentional emotion, in his emotion as *causing to see*' (p.210). Divinity is still involved in the aesthetic judgement, although it is now a divinity reflected upon after the immediacy of creative intuition rather than a divine effulgence shining through a re-creative act credited only with secondary importance. If this final end is not looked towards, however, then the poet must suffer an ultimately void self-interiority – which, for Maritain is demonstrated by the most severe excesses of Surrealism. Such a purely hedonistic empathy with external form 'would be a kind of spiritual unchastity' (p.210), as misguided as any adherence to the most rigorous and life-denying dictates of abstractionism.

Maritain begins his enquiry with a psychological investigation into historical and anthropological structures, which he prefaces with the argument that aesthetic difference between peoples 'does not proceed from the Things that man contemplates. It proceeds from men who contemplate Things' (p.16). In this analysis of aesthetic volition he reverses earlier Modernist paradigms – including his own concerning primitive art – which had argued an equivalence between the transcendental abstract art of Eastern cultures and the modern art of the West; furthermore, he describes this Western tradition in terms of an ever increasing revelation of the artist's subjectivity, not as a tradition whose subjectivity must of necessity suffer curtailment.

Oriental art is the opposite of Western individualism and never says 'I.' It endeavors to hide the human Self and to stare only at Things. It is primarily directed toward communion with and expression of the transnatural, particularly the sacred content which is meant by Nature and by Things. But to the very extent to which it reveals the secret meanings of Things, Oriental art cannot help obscurely revealing also, despite itself, the creative subjectivity of the artist. The more the poetic perception which animates art catches and manifests the inner side of Things, the more it involves at the same time a disclosure and manifestation of the human Self. (p.17)

Oriental art is intent upon objective 'Things' and not upon the interior life of the subject: it is first and foremost an intellectual art. Because, however, Maritain's survey of

aesthetics is formulated according to a dialectical and Kantian conception of mind structured around the dual significance of both intellectual and intuitive faculties, the object or 'Thing' can never live a privileged existence entirely apart from subjective conditions. The result of which fact being that 'Self' is necessarily revealed in the object.

Being the opposite of Oriental art, the converse holds true for Western art which, concentrating upon a revelation of subjectivity, cannot yet avoid an apprehension of objective essences. In both these types of art subject and object are revealed together, but in the Western phase of modern art and poetry, to which Maritain devotes the main attention of his study, objectivity is revealed as an effect of subjective application. The ontology of the art work is no longer measured according to the metaphysical essence of the thing in the abstract, but consists in a radiance of significance emanating from the creative subject:

Nature, for the painter, is no longer a separate thing-in-itself, but Nature, in some of her inner aspects, has reached the heart of creative subjectivity, as a germ of that object which is the work to be born. Accordingly, the painter (who henceforth is simply nothing if he lacks poetic vision) sees deeper into Things, though in the dark of Things and of his own Self....And because subjectivity has become the very vehicle to penetrate into the objective world, what is thus looked for in visible Things must have the same kind of inner depth and inexhaustible potentialities for revelation as the Self of the painter. As a result, modern painting at its best attains, while remaining strictly painting, to a sort of ontological vastness, and to a superior – though paradoxical for logical reason – degree of intellectuality. (p.26)

Maritain details the history of Western art in terms of 'The Advent of the Self'. In the first early Christian phase there is a proximity to Oriental art and 'the mystery of the Person comes into sight as a mere object, in the world of Things but transcending Things' (p.20). The human soul 'remains veiled behind the intellectual and universal, dogmatic significance of sacred symbols and figures. The divinity of Christ soars over everything' (pp.20-21). The human soul cannot participate in that free exchange of vast significances described by Maritain as typical of modern art – instead all signs are ordered towards one object alone, an object external to subjective experience. The mystery of the person becomes the inscrutable divinity of Christ.

In the second phase the mystery of the Person still comes into sight as a mere object, in the world of Things though transcending Things. But now – in Gothic architecture's times...this

mystery discloses its more human depths...The human soul gleams everywhere through the barred windows of the objective world, the human Self is more and more present on the stage, in the manner of an object which art offers to our sight. (p.21)

Confronted with this terminology, we are reminded of Worringer's descriptions of an interior mysticism slowly turning mechanical, rational abstractions inside out; the reference to Gothic architecture is set in a very different context to Maritain's previous conception, in which such a structure was considered to demonstrate a transcendent spiritual authority working through its builders. Here the theorist increasingly approaches the Hegelian idea of an immanent spirituality, with Christ the sacred exemplar of God in man and the cathedral an aesthetic representation of this internalized divinity: 'In every great work of architecture the virtue of poetry is so powerful that the functional destination is absorbed, so to speak, in the self-subsistence and self-necessity of a man-made cosmos' (p.264).¹⁵⁴

In the third stage 'the sense of the human Self and of human subjectivity enters a process of internalization, and passes from the *object* depicted to the *mode* with which the artist performs his work. Then occurs the outburst of individualism commonly pointed out apropos of the Renaissance, baroque art, and our classical art' (p.21). Maritain's bias against this epoch is maintained, for in it he sees neither a concern with objects nor a proper concern with subjectivity, only a concern with 'modes' and the materialistic criteria of the work's production and effect – its technical accomplishments, its scientific accuracy, its preoccupation with pointless mimesis.

In the fourth and final stage, the stage of modern art and poetry,

the process of internalization through which human consciousness has passed from the concept of the Person to the very experience of subjectivity comes to fulfilment: it reaches the creative act itself. Now subjectivity is revealed, I mean as creative. At the same time and by the same token is also revealed the intuitive, and entirely individualized, way through which subjectivity communes with the world in the creative act. While being set free, the basic need for self-expression quickens and makes specific the new relationship of the artist to Things. The inner meanings of Things are enigmatically grasped through the artist's Self, and both are manifested in the work together. This was the time when poetry became conscious of itself. (p.25)

It is clear that Maritain has cast an aesthetic which is indubitably subjective in content. Besides a technical description of the operations of an obscure 'preconscious life of the intellect' at the root of all poetic creation, he gives his theoretical assertions an

historical validation. Modern poetry finds itself at the end of a long tradition in which an early objectivism develops into a unadulterated subjectivism. The aesthetic act reveals the whole being of the creative individual and also, by virtue of the intentional nature of the primary emotion involved, extends the creative act into a realm of objectivity. What Maritain has defined is Kant's idea of an emotional response to form which, involving a non-determined or non-conceptual faculty of the reason, must first and foremost be considered as subjective, but which also, by virtue of this indefinable relation to the spiritually ordered intellect, lends an ineffable objectivity to considerations:

What does this mean? What is the philosophical impact of this factual conclusion? Our descriptive and inductive enquiry suggests that at the root of the creative act there must be a quite particular intellectual process, without parallel in logical reason, through which Things and the Self are grasped together by means of a kind of experience or knowledge which has no conceptual expression and is expressed only in the artist's work. Are we to think – but how can this be possible? – that in such an experience, creative in nature, Things are grasped in the Self and the Self is grasped in Things, and subjectivity becomes a means of catching obscurely the inner side of Things? (pp.29-30)

Surely these are the type of epistemological questions which Maritain had originally sought to avoid by repudiating the Kantian position in favour of a clear metaphysical hierarchy, a hierarchy in which the Romantic doctrine of immanence expounded here found itself humbled before the 'beauty of Scripture and the Liturgy', the 'mystic writers' and 'the spiritual fullness of mediaeval art'.¹⁵⁵ In *Art and Scholasticism* the artist was faced with a choice: either art rediscovered God, or art descended into a nonsensical realm of irrational turmoil. Maritain, after some consideration, made his own position quite clear by stating that 'a philosopher's professional duty is to remain in the sky of metaphysics, the only enduring empyrean' (p.87). Yet in this later work it has been seen that, rather than dwelling in the metaphysical realm of concepts and essences, the poet-philosopher would reside instead in a relativistic world defined only by its contingency and 'flashes of experience'. As Wyndham Lewis anticipated, Maritain reverts to an effusive Bergsonism. There is a plainly apparent contradiction between the earlier statement in which Maritain concludes that 'nothing concerns Art but its objects; it has no concern whatever with subjects', and the later notion, given in 1953, that poetic knowledge is 'born in the preconscious of the spirit – in which the

world is known *in and through* the subjectivity, grasped both together and inseparably by means of an emotion become intentional and intuitive' (p.141).¹⁵⁶

It is clear that by 1953 Maritain had repudiated the objectivism which defined his earlier work, and which Umberto Eco describes as a 'dogmatic attempt to define once and for all the ontological character of beauty'.¹⁵⁷ However, although his position may be regarded as essentially subjective, the nature of the emotion involved in the creative act cannot be regarded as that which Maritain terms the 'brute or merely subjective emotion' championed by exponents of modern psychological research. Maritain arrives at a notion of creative emotion as necessarily intentional: that is, ordered towards, if not actually derived from, a transcendent realm of spirituality. Thus it is that his new aesthetic can claim to lie between two regions: between, on the one hand, the insistent and unforgiving anti-subjectivism of early Modernism and, on the other, the Godless and entirely unthinking productions of Surrealism:

So the Platonic and the Surrealist notions of poetry are divided from one another, and diametrically opposed, as a philosophy of absolute transcendence is divided from and opposed to, a philosophy (Hegelian in its roots) of absolute immanence. Yet the fact remains that, like the Surrealists, though for opposite motives, Plato totally separates poetic inspiration from reason. The myth of the Muse signifies that the source of poetry is separate from the human intellect, outside of it, in the transcendent eternal fatherland of subsisting Ideas.¹⁵⁸

Maritain distinguishes between these two separate poetic justifications and offers his own synthetic alternative. The truth, he claims, is neither in the 'Surrealist inferno' (p.66), nor is it in the 'Platonic heaven' (p.66). Rather than rest content with one or other of these polarities, he continues, 'I think that what we have to do is to make the Platonic Muse descend into the soul of man, where she is no longer Muse but creative intuition; and Platonic inspiration descend into the intellect united with imagination, where inspiration from above the soul becomes inspiration from above conceptual reason, that is, poetic experience' (p.66). Such a process of internalization is testament to 'the existence in us of a spiritual – not animal – unconscious activity' (p.66). We do not participate in the Freudian realms of the subconscious alone, which 'is a sign of the dullness of our times' (p.67), but in this animal 'unconscious of blood and flesh, instincts, tendencies, complexes, repressed images and desires, traumatic memories' (p.67) *as well as* the 'pre-conscious of the spirit in its living strings' (p.67). Therefore Maritain justifies his claim that 'poetry is the fruit neither of the intellect alone, nor of imagination alone. Nay more, it proceeds from the totality of man, sense, imagination,

intellect, love, desire, instinct, blood and spirit together. And the first obligation imposed on the poet is to consent to be brought back to the hidden place, near the center of the soul, where this totality exists in the state of a creative source' (p.80).

This apocalyptic sentiment, in which poetry 'proceeds from the totality of man' illustrates how close Maritain comes to the aesthetic of immanence derived from Kant and Hegel. Whatever status Maritain now affords them, it is certain that all traditional metaphysical systems are brought under the jurisdiction of the internally located creative intuition. Subjectivity comes to know spirituality through its own inner life – and only then are theological suppositions made possible:

I mean subjectivity in its deepest ontologic sense, that is, the substantial totality of the human person, a universe unto itself, which the spirituality of the soul makes capable of containing itself through its own immanent acts, and which, at the center of all the subjects that it knows as objects, grasps only itself as subject. In a way similar to that in which divine creation presupposes the knowledge God has of His own essence, poetic creation presupposes, as a primary requirement, a grasping, by the poet, of his own subjectivity, in order to create. (p.82)

The primary requirement of the poet is not to grasp, through the intellect, a continuing aspect of divine creation, but to look into his own subjectivity and, in a way *analogous* to God's incarnation, thence to re-create aspects of his own subjective essence. There is no *a priori* rational connection between these two orders of creation. There is posited here only a similarity. The soul or the spirit knows itself only through immanent acts – it is from such immanence alone that it may proceed: 'All that he discerns and divines in things, he discerns and divines not as something *other* than himself, according to the law of speculative knowledge, but, on the contrary, as inseparable from himself and from his emotion, and in truth as identified with himself' (p.83). Maritain is returned to Nietzsche's proclamation that 'we have again *taken back* the predicates of things, or at least remembered that it was we who *lent* them to them' and brought into line with the conception that modern art, far from taking recourse to the abstractions of a metaphysical orthodoxy pushes on towards a Romantic, subjective entelechy. The ontology of which Maritain now speaks is not one concerned with being in an abstract or metaphysical sense, but existential being.

4.8 Maritain's Teleological Aesthetic

Echoing Kant, Maritain attempts to harness his definitions of subjective aesthetic response to teleological considerations. Thus it is that 'pure creation is not possible to man. Some inner content, received from elsewhere, is necessarily present' (p.57). Having established the creative intuition to be located in the innermost recess of the intellectual faculty and, moreover, beyond any sort of conceptual analysis or cognition, we are faced with the idea that this ineffable inner content has, in fact, its provenance elsewhere. The theorist, having nervously explored an indeterminate pre-conceptual life of the intellect, wavers between the irrationalism of Bergson and the security of orthodox metaphysical propositions; between an external and an internal mythology, evoking as he does so Nietzsche's vision of the modern philosopher:

we modern men are so accustomed to and brought up in the necessity of logic that it lies on our palate as the normal taste and, as such, cannot help being repugnant to the lustful and conceited. These take delight in that which stands out in opposition to it: their more refined ambition would all too gladly have them believe that their souls are exceptions, not dialectical or rational beings but – well, 'intuitive beings', for instance, gifted with an 'inner sense' or with 'intellectual intuition'. Above all, however, they want to be 'artistic natures', with a genius in their head and a demon in their body and consequently enjoying special rights in both worlds, and especially the divine privilege of being incomprehensible. – *That* is what now does philosophy! I fear they will one day see that they have made a mistake – what they want is religion!¹⁵⁹

Maritain begins to confuse even himself, asking 'how can emotion be thus raised to the level of the intellect and, as it were, take the place of the concept in becoming for the intellect a determining means or instrumental vehicle through which reality is grasped?'.¹⁶⁰ He gives his answer with reference to the idea of an intentional emotion – that is, he argues that in any exercise of the creative intuition there is an emotion, similar to Kant's free-play of the imagination, which is not simply a base human emotion but which is able to fuse intellect and sensibility so that the pure inwardness of any aesthetic judgement or act is still able to involve a recognition of objective essences which in turn allows that emotion to connect subjectivity with sublimity. It is not so much a case of an 'inner content received from elsewhere' as an inner content providing its own justification for the supposition of an external realm of being on the basis of an ineffable harmony or 'connaturality' felt between it and the 'Things' it perceives:

And it suffices for emotion disposing or inclining...the entire soul in a certain determinate manner to be thus received in the undetermined vitality and productivity of the spirit, where it is permeated by the light of the Illuminating Intellect: then, while remaining emotion, it is made – with respect to the aspects in things which are connatural to, or *like*, the soul it imbues – into an instrument of intelligence judging through connaturality, and plays, in the process of this knowledge through *likeness* between reality and subjectivity, the part of a nonconceptual intrinsic determination of intelligence in its preconscious activity. By this very fact it is transferred into the state of objective intentionality; it is spiritualized, it becomes intentional, that is to say, conveying, in a state of immateriality, things other than itself. (pp.88-89)

4.9 Modern Poetry

Maritain's various receptions and criticisms of modern poetry depend upon this finely held balance between the idea of poetic knowledge proceeding from the pure inwardness of the human unconscious on the one hand, and from a craving for Intellectual certainty on the other. He conceives of two types of modern poetry, each proceeding from these respective positions. He cites Baudelaire as the father of the modern poetic consciousness, for he knew that 'beauty is one of the Divine Names. But the fact with which his own experience was obsessed and which his extraordinary power of perception made clear – and this event has a crucial significance for poetry in modern times – is that now this Divine Name is detached from God, and reigns *separate* in our human heaven' (p.136). According to Maritain it was from this decadent conclusion that the options arose with which modern poetry was faced:

Because its own spirituality was revealed to it, poetry was engaged more and more deeply, more and more irremediably, in a spiritual experience of its own. But while descending into spiritual experience, one inevitably meets with the enigma of destiny, and with the prime questions and choices which hold sway over existence. By virtue of the option made in these depths, the spiritual experience of modern poetry has been ambivalent, and this basic ambivalence has been inevitably revealed by the two directions, more and more definite, in which poetry has simultaneously moved forward, in proportion as the poets were more and more aware of their fundamental options and committed themselves more profoundly to them. Hence it is that finally the spiritual experience of modern poetry is double-faced and self-divided; while determining itself,

and this is its grandeur, with respect to the Prime Being, it has here the countenance of the ardor in refusal, there the countenance of the ardor in acceptance. (pp.136-137)

Thus it is that 'with Mallarmé and Valéry, the option for the rejection of transcendence taught modern poetry the experience of the void (and also, as concerns Mallarmé, a faint hope in magic)' (p.138). Again, with Joyce, Maritain wonders if he 'did not emerge from some similar experience of the void – and a haunting memory of a lost paradise guarded by the sword of a fiery Irish angel' (p.138). D.H. Lawrence expressed through this same poetic rejection of transcendence a Bergsonian 'experience of an intolerable solitude craving for mystical fusion with the demonism of Nature' (p.138), and poets such as Dylan Thomas and Hart Crane demonstrate that the poet 'is not concerned with the intellectual mystery of the significative and constructive power of the Word, but with the mysterious screen or obstacle that thwarts in every sign the function of signification' (pp.194-195). They want 'to get free from this inherent screen by humbling and dislocating the words, so as to make them more flexible and more transparent (though in darkness) instruments of intuitive emotion' (p.195). Such poets are not interested in a logocentric conception of language, but seek instead a means by which language might be made to express the core of their creative subjectivity.

In distinction to this autobiographical lyricism, Maritain cites another modern idiom produced by, amongst others, Francis Thompson, Hopkins, Pound and Eliot: 'Let us call such poems "difficult" or "hermetic." Their obscurity comes in reality either from the heavy concentrated intelligibility and the complexity of logical connotations with which they are burdened, or from so tense a concern for the power of significance of the logos that one would want to make of the whole fabric of the poem one single intelligible word' (p.194). The poem is obscure and difficult not because it seeks to translate and express the inchoate internal significances of subjectivity, to make words more 'transparent' and 'flexible', but for the entirely opposite reason that it attempts to phrase the one external, absolute and objective truth in a language resonant with emotional, human significances which resist such metaphysical conformity.

The idea of an expansive signification is crucial to Maritain. Furthermore, his philosophical and critical emphasis is placed not on the latter type of poetry in which language is made to conform to the one ideal referent, made to speak the one originating Word, but on a poetry which allows an endless signification according to the subjective desires and volitions of what he describes as an internalized creative music – that poetry exemplified by the lyrical endeavours of, for example Hart Crane and Dylan

Thomas, both of whom are continually cited: 'The essential thing is that there should be a sign and signification. If I do not know exactly what a given sign signifies, well, it is then free to signify *everything* for me. In a sense, poetical joy and affective exaltation will then only become vaster in becoming more indeterminate' (pp.198-199).

Maritain demonstrates the relationship between the symbol and its purely subjective significance by referring to Arthurian myth which presents 'a typical process of *poetic internalization*. Pre-existing symbols – primitively characterized by the sheer exteriority either of the properties and enchantments of a fairy world, or of the various obligations and trials incurred by the characters, or of their adventures – were to become signs of abiding dreams and realities of the human soul' (p.330, n.36). External symbols are invested with subjective meaning, abstractions are read empathically, 'the reader is confronted with a work of words which does not signify first a *definite set of things* – the wall of separation has fallen. The poem signifies only the unconceptualizable flash of reality obscurely grasped in the mystery of the world by the intuitive emotion of the poet' (p.216). Words, no longer 'subjected to the sovereignty of rational connections and logical objectivity' (p.212), no longer signify concepts and, following on from concepts, indisputable objective essences: 'And thus the words immediately bring the reader back to the inner music of the intuitive pulsions stirred in the imagination of the poet, and finally, through this music, to a participation in the poetic intuition naturally expressed by this music' (p.216). Arthurian myth, with all its obscured and forgotten meanings, is not taken up by hierarchically minded poets with a view to asserting a transcendent, Platonic 'fatherland of subsisting ideas', but is material evidence of 'the extraordinary polyvalence and plasticity of the forms that the primitive themes, characters, and marvelous [sic] objects of the romance progressively took, all the while penetrating into the collective unconscious of the Western world' (p.330, n.36).

The need to create myths arises from a modern poetic experience of void, itself a result of intellectual uncertainties. Myth, however, does not define and justify poetry in any metaphysical sense. On the contrary, 'it deals essentially, like the spiritual experience itself in which it originates, with the inner universe of the poet *as a man*, with the intellectual and moral foundations of his life, with his anguish and his crucial choices' (p.317, n.19). Modern mythology is, according to Maritain, above all else an anthropomorphic mythology. Maritain asserts, like Vernon Lee or J.F. Hendry, that the only teleology of which a man may be sure is that which proceeds from the fact that he is a man: 'The effort of a poet to create new metaphysical myths of his own invention, for the sake of his work as a poet, is self-contradictory, since, having invented them, he cannot believe in them. A man lost in the night might as well invent

an imaginary moon because he needs to have his way lighted. The only way for a poet to become inspired by a new metaphysical myth is his faith as a man' (p.318, n.19). A faith in 'the inner universe of the poet as a man' is the only possible way of providing material for a poetic mythology, whether that involves 'the mysticism of sex so dear to D.H. Lawrence, or the occultist disciplines so dear to Yeats, or the state-totalitarianism so dear to Ezra Pound, or the black magic so dear to Surrealists' (p.318, n.19); or, indeed, if it involves a conception of Christianity realized from the locus of the creative mind and not imposed externally upon it, 'which becomes new to him – an always new "myth," an always new truth – in proportion as he believes in it with renewed and deeper faith' (p.318, n.19). The poet may no longer be perceived as a seer of obscure metaphysical truths, for 'it is not from the poet that the man has received a new myth, it is from the man that the poet has received a new vital belief' (p.318, n.19). For Maritain, the desire for myth 'is a question of the soil on which poetry grows, not of poetry in its own essence' (p.319, n.19), and therefore poetry cannot claim for itself an autonomous status offering some religious object which man has lost. Indeed, Maritain concludes, 'in his very failure or despair to create the new myth he looks for, a real poet may produce his most genuine poems' (p.319, n.19). Poetry and the symbolic language it uses express a mythology which has its origins in the creative intuition. Such a mythology might be the mythology of faith or loss of faith; in whatever instance, it is always an interior and subjective mythology whose poetic form must be considered secondary to the imaginative experience it constitutes: it is not a transcendent mythology brought down to justify an externalized and religiously inclined alternative to the inspirations of the creative intuition.

In this context Maritain embarks upon a specific redefinition of Modernist aesthetic principles. He berates an insistence upon both abstractionism in the visual arts and the excesses of New Critical ideologies in the literary sphere for their repudiation of creative subjectivity in favour of a new religiously inclined mythology:

What matters to poetry in a close and direct manner are, I think, certain extremely simple but basic *presences* or existential certainties, assured by the universe of thought which constitutes the vital environment of poetic intuition: for instance a certitude both of the mysterious irrefragable existence and the exigency of intelligibility involved in things; a certitude of the *interiority* of the human being, and of its importance; a certitude that between man and the world there is an invisible relationship deeper than any material interconnection; a certitude that the impact of his freedom on his destiny gives his life a movement which is *oriented*, and not lost in the void, and which has to do, in one way or another, with the whole fabric of being. (p.276)

Poetry must remain at all times aware of its provenance in the interiority of the human being. It is this subjective freedom which allows poetry to make a choice about its own orientation and, if it chooses wisely, it will order itself towards spiritual truths and reject the purposeless void. Given the primary importance of this poetic freedom, any attempt to establish a religiously inclined objectivism in its place must be considered anathema. Maritain considers that the type of critical opinion generated by Eliot, for instance, in ignoring the possibility of an intentional nature of poetic emotion, and fearing only an heretical and self-obsessed Romanticism, causes a dogmatic literary criticism which precludes all that is most important to poetry.

Bad Romanticism made of 'inspiration' an excuse for facility, or simple release of brute emotions and passions, or uncontrolled flux of shallow words and sentimentalism. It is unfortunate that both the reaction (sometimes one-sided) of a sound and strict criticism against such a fraud and the blind prejudices of our 'scientific' psychology have resulted in the strong and strongly unintelligent contemporary loathing for the very word and notion of inspiration. Nothing is more real, and more necessary to poetry, and to any great work, than inspiration. And nothing is more natural, and more *internal*. (p.180)

Maritain sets himself the task of redefining a 'strict', 'sound' but occasionally 'one-sided' literary critical consensus in order to provide absolutely no justification for polemical tirades against the notions of subjectivity and inspiration in modern art and poetry. The 'strong and strongly unintelligent contemporary loathing' for Romanticism of which he speaks might be perfectly illustrated by the speculations of T.E. Hulme. The one-sided critical justifications for such reactionary views might be represented by essays such as Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', in which art and experience are ventured by the author as eternally separate. Maritain attempts to restore all those elements of a dialectical aesthetic to the earlier critical disciplines which had sought their denial. By doing so he necessarily reappraises his own system, as has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, by giving increased primacy to Kantian registers of thought rather than reducing these subjective principles into conformity with a strict Thomism.

The mistake has been to look for freedom *from* something – first from an error: servile imitation or copy of natural appearances, but then from the existential world of Nature itself, and from any kind of representation whatever of natural appearances – instead of looking for freedom *to* achieve

in one's work a more and more genuine revelation both of Things and the Self, and to obey creative forces in a manner truer and truer to a deeper and deeper poetic intuition. (p.164)

4.10 Rewriting Eliot

A reaction to the over confidences of the 'Renaissance attitude', an attitude considered by Maritain to be genuinely erroneous, should not, however, involve an equally arrogant repudiation of nature. Maritain suggests that Eliot, in his essays 'The Perfect Critic' and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' fails to properly distinguish between 'brute or merely subjective emotion', as Maritain puts it, and 'intentional emotion'. This leads Eliot to form an aesthetic which runs the risk of completely excluding the idea of personal creativity from any aesthetic equation. Maritain's definition of 'brute or merely subjective emotion' closely follows that type of emotion discounted by Kant in any aesthetic judgement – namely, an emotion that is purely sensual and physical or, as Maritain has it, 'merely matter or material' (p.310, n.7). According to Maritain, Eliot treats all emotion as if it derives from these base sources and forgets that emotion which, whilst being subjective and non-conceptual, tends towards spiritual truths. In other words, Maritain effectively accuses Eliot of appropriating Kant's criticism of purely physically related emotion whilst ignoring the alternative and necessary idea of a subjective emotion which, through the free-play of the imagination, attains a teleological or, in Maritain's phraseology, 'intentional' significance:

It is quite true that, as he puts it in 'The Perfect Critic,' one who reads poets should not mistake for the poetry 'an emotional state aroused in himself by the poetry, a state which may be merely an indulgence of his own emotions.' (This deals with brute or merely subjective emotion.) It is quite true that 'the end of the enjoyment of poetry is a pure contemplation from which all the accidents of personal emotion are removed' – that is, all accidents of brute or merely subjective emotion. But this pure contemplation itself is steeped in the *creative emotion* or poetic intuition conveyed by the poem. (p.310, n.7)

Maritain accuses Eliot of a one-sided reading of modern aesthetics. For Maritain 'the pressure of the artistic process would be of no avail to poetry if it did not proceed from poetic intuition or creative emotion' (p.310, n.7). Therefore, by suppressing any relation of poetry to subjectivity, even if that subjectivity tends towards the spiritual

absolutes he desires to claim for it, Eliot reduces poetry to a senseless anti-humanism which denies any possibility of a bridge between man and divinity. This is something which Eliot also commits himself to in the essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', from which Maritain quotes:

'The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual fact emotions at all.' All this deals with emotion as material, with brute or merely subjective emotion. It would mislead us if we forgot the essential, necessary part played by that emotion which *causes to express*, emotion as formative, emotion as intentional vehicle of reality known through inclination and as proper medium of poetic intuition. This creative emotion, moreover, distinct as it is from the merely subjective emotions or feelings of the poet as a man, lives on them, so that, while being bound to transmute them, he cannot 'escape from them' as simply as Eliot seems to suggest. It would be misunderstanding Eliot in a most unfortunate manner to believe that self-restraint is enough for this, and finally to mistake poetic discipline for artistic skill *plus* desiccation of the heart. (pp.310-311, n.7)

According to Maritain, we must ignore what Eliot 'seems to suggest', trusting that when he later writes about *significant* emotion, he means 'intentional and creative emotion, without which there is no poetry' (p.311, n.7). And it is this '*significant* emotion' (p.311, n.7), states Maritain, which 'deserved better than to be only alluded to in passing' (p.311, n.7). There can be no dislocation of man's emotional life from the life of his poetry. The intentional nature of poetic knowledge may be ordered towards a spiritual region, but that intentional knowledge is itself predicated upon 'the merely subjective emotions or feelings of the poet as a man'. Poetry proceeds towards a spiritualized expression but always proceeds from the pure interiority of man; it cannot suffer the imposition of an external and transcendental mythology. Poetry, before serving any other purpose, discovers its life in the personality of its author:

I am afraid that T.S. Eliot, in his essay on 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' missed the distinction between creative Self and self-centered ego, just as that between creative emotion and brute or merely subjective emotion. That is probably why, rightly stressing that poetry is not 'expression of personality' in the sense of *individuality* or *self-centered ego*, but disregarding the fact that the poet is not only an individual, a material ego, but also (and, as a poet, much more essentially) a person, a creative Self, he uses the word 'personality' where *individuality* is

concerned, and conceives the poet as a mere 'catalyst' and 'only a medium, not a personality'.
(p.313, n.18)

Maritain echoes the position arrived at by Herbert Read in his work *Form in Modern Poetry* – ironically influenced by the implicit although suppressed subjectivism of *Art and Scholasticism* – in which he 'takes a stand' against Eliot's position on impersonality, arguing that 'we cannot hope to arrive at a definition of personality without encroaching to some extent on the science of psychology',¹⁶¹ and that 'criticism must concern itself, not only with the work of art in itself, but also with the process of writing, and the writer's state of mind when inspired – that is to say, criticism must concern itself, not only with the finished work of art, but also with the workman, his mental activity and his tools' (p.8). As in these statements by Herbert Read, and those made by J.F. Hendry and the New Apocalypse poets, Maritain concurs that modern poetry must seek its explanations in an interior origin and not, as in Eliot's aesthetic, be considered the culmination of a religious process in which the poet is but a 'catalyst' to, or 'medium' of, external forces. Once again Maritain responds to Eliot's over-general dismissal of emotion in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

'The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates.' In reality the man who suffers *is in* the mind which creates – as creative subjectivity and to be given in the work – separated from the self-centered ego by the operation of poetic knowledge and creative emotion. In this sense only is it true that 'the emotion of art is impersonal' – that is to say detached from the self-centered ego and one with poetic intuition, the most personal act of the creative Self. (p.313, n.18)

Similarly, Herbert Read stresses that a poet should avoid not personality, indeed this is the essential requirement of all poetry, but 'fixity of character' which finds its equivalence in Maritain's idea of the 'self-centered ego'. In Read's aesthetic, as in Maritain's, what is important is the supposition of an indeterminate pre-conscious life of the intellect which is the primary source of poetic knowledge and which generates forms tending towards a higher order of reality only by virtue of this subjective premise. As in Maritain's system, there is to be no brute emotion and concomitant sentimental romanticism involved in any creative operation but also, and more importantly, no atrophy of inspiration. First there is the subjective, creative, poetic intuition and only then is there a referral of this emotional material to the intellect and

finally, by virtue of this last fact, there is derived from the creative act an intimation of sublimity. Read speaks of a poetic knowledge which 'relates the coherence of the personality to the coherence of thought – thought which is guaranteed by its own laws, thought which is ever in accord with the universal' (p.78), for the poet must 'live in the fleeting moments of vision, but in these moments his vision penetrates very deep and far, and the degree of its penetration is measured by the range of the poet's thought or intelligence' (p.78). Poetry's task is to access the sublime risking neither a 'desiccation of the heart' nor, conversely, a 'false interiority'. T.F. Burns's introduction to *Form in Modern Poetry* reminds us of the dilemma Maritain reveals for modern poetry and of its possible solution in terms of what Maritain had cited in his *Art and Scholasticism* as the necessary increase of 'self knowledge' :

'Self-knowledge' in the spiritual life ends in nothing but the Joycean 'agenbite of inwit' or a static diagram unless it be informed by an immanent principle which is the personal apprehension of a transcendent one. 'Self-knowledge' in the arts is an impoverishing indigging unless it has its principle of form, immanent of necessity but in accord with what lies beyond the 'Frontiers of Poetry'. (p.x)

In Herbert Read's aesthetic the search for self-knowledge and its terminological references are unashamedly derived from Freud and Jung: 'Mr. Read in availing himself of theories of contemporary psychology is taking a risky but a necessary step' (p.x) and 'a metaphysical excursus is not necessary, indeed not desirable, for an appreciation of his points' (p.xi). Maritain is more cautious to maintain for his system a more explicitly teleological significance. That aside, it might be said that they belong to the same neo-Romantic discourse attempting to rewrite, if not to completely change, the hyper-objective Modernist dictates of Eliot and his generation. Herbert Read quotes a passage from Benedetto Croce which reads very much like a piece from the later work of Maritain. In his earlier work Maritain, like T.E. Hulme, disparaged Croce's neo-Hegelian aesthetic. The following passage, by virtue of its proximity to Maritain's developed thought, will perhaps suggest the extent to which he might be considered to have withdrawn from his initial objectivist position.

Poetry is produced not by the mere caprice of pleasure, but by natural necessity. It is so far from being superfluous and capable of elimination, that without it thought cannot arise: it is the primary activity of the human mind. Man, before he has arrived at the stage of forming universals, forms imaginary ideas. Before he reflects with a clear mind, he apprehends with faculties confused and disturbed: before he can articulate, he sings: before speaking in prose, he

speaks in verse: before using technical terms, he uses metaphors, and the metaphorical use of words is as natural to him as that which we call 'natural.'¹⁶²

4.11 The *Criterion* Debate: Intellect vs Intuition

Having established these reactions to Eliot's poetic, reactions concordant with a general tendency away from the rigours of Thomistic objectivism and towards neo-Kantian definitions of an intuitive life of the intellect, it would be as well to scrutinize Eliot's side of the argument. This can be done by focusing on various articles written by him and others in the *Monthly Criterion* throughout the late 1920s. For it was here that a debate was conducted between those lending emphasis to an intellectualist conception of aesthetics, such as Eliot himself, and those, such as John Middleton Murry, who supported the position which we have seen Maritain finally embrace, and in which a pre-conceptual faculty of mind is given primacy in definitions of aesthetic creation and judgement.

In a review of Herbert Read's *Reason and Romanticism* and Ramon Fernandez's *Messages* is discovered the following statement in which Eliot reveals the choice, by now familiar to us, with which modern poetry is faced. The issue, claims Eliot, is between those who

make *man the measure of all things*, and those who would find an extra-human measure. There are those who find this measure in a revealed religion, and those who, like Mr. Irving Babbitt and Mr. Read, look for it without pretending to have found it. In order to make man the measure of all things, M. Fernandez...has to assume a theory of reality which seems to be that of traditional psychology. The Mind seems to have for M. Fernandez a primal reality, psychology seems to take precedence over ontology.¹⁶³

Babbitt, Read and Fernandez, Eliot seems to suggest, do not unquestioningly assume man to be the measure of all things. They do not, however, discover a necessary extra-human measure in the security of revealed religion, but in an internalized metaphysic, a primal psychological reality – such as that ventured in Maritain's revelations of the sources of poetic knowledge – which does not extend to intellectual and ontological assertion. This is a position which Eliot has manifest trouble accepting:

Why should Mr. Read take the psychological plane so seriously; and what does he mean by unconscious symbols? If we are unconscious that a symbol is a symbol, then is it a symbol at all? and the moment we become conscious that it is a symbol, is it any longer a symbol? Mr Read is on the verge of getting involved in the problem of Transsubstantiation. M. Fernandez is in danger of being an idealist without ideals; Mr. Read of being a realist without real objects. Both are struggling to find an objective truth; both are encumbered by the wipings of psychology. (p.756)

It is easy to sense Eliot yearning here for the religious idealism from which such Thomistic disciples as Maritain were turning in favour of more subjective researches. Eliot attempts to reclaim Read and Fernandez into his dogmatic epistemology or, as he terms it, 'moral hierarchy', just as in 1953 Maritain would, with more than a measure of coercive interpretation, attempt to include Eliot in a canon of poetic thought defined according to its psychological sympathies; for, as Eliot appeals, 'to insist on another faculty "intuition" is merely to demand a more potent and thuriferous ju-ju. And I think that M. Fernandez, as well as Mr. Read, will be on the side of what we call "the intelligence"' (p.757).

John Middleton Murry in an article of June 1927 reacts specifically to Eliot's critique of Herbert Read and Ramon Fernandez. Murry, like Worringer and Read sought to justify modern aesthetics in terms of psychology, whereas Eliot, he assumes, accepts a Thomist epistemology with its metaphysical theory of knowledge which is 'singularly difficult to criticise, simply because it has singularly little reference to the actual process of knowing in human experience'.¹⁶⁴ It is Murry's position that if such a theory of knowledge is embraced, then must all its theological and ontological significances be accepted also. Murry argues that this is an impossible task for modern man to undertake: pure reason and pure faith may no longer be resolved as a 'mediaeval synthesis' (p.300) phrased in an 'indivisible life of the soul' (p.300). Reason, as Kant had shown, could not extend itself into the realms of the infinite, and neither would faith stave off the scientific and empirical researches of Renaissance and post-Renaissance humanism.

Any commitment to the Thomistic conception of synthesis must not be directed towards an externalized epistemology in which the intellect becomes an instrument of faith, but must be modified so as to concentrate on interior processes. This is Murry's concern: the Renaissance ideology and the scientific materialism of the nineteenth century had led man to believe in science alone. Such an unpropitious state of affairs,

however, could not be remedied by returning to purely metaphysical registers of knowledge. Instead, a realization of the incapacities of the human reason should allow the subject to focus upon the previously uncharted realms of his own psychology, to discover what he could in the pre-conscious life of his intellect:

As a provisional schematism, therefore, I suggest an equivalence of intelligence and intuition, as aspects of the indivisible soul or psychical reality, maintained in a tense and pregnant antinomy. Intuition is the faculty by which the full, concrete reality is (to use a word of Professor Whitehead's) prehended, that is to say, encountered and, as it were, absorbed without necessary cognition; intelligence is the faculty of cognition, that operates through concept and abstraction. The constant effort of a living soul is two-fold: to master by cognition the intuitively prehended reality, and to revivify, as it were, by a new injection of the intuitive reality, the conceptual hierarchy into which cognition has frozen it. (p.308)

Murry proposes a synthesis of intellect and intuition as an aspect of the 'indivisible soul' which, however, is not the repository of concepts, but of a 'psychical reality'. In this synthesis there is no ascendancy of intellect, but the 'conceptual hierarchy' which the intellect establishes from the intuitively prehended flux of reality is subject to perpetual revivification by the creative intuition.

Murry defines an immanent synthesis in reaction to which Eliot is only prepared to say: 'I am willing to admit, in a rough and ready way, that "intelligence is the genus, intuition and discourse the species".'¹⁶⁵ Eliot was not alone in his insistence upon the primacy of the intellect in any type of cognition, aesthetic or otherwise. The Reverend M.C. D'Arcy furnishes a fine example of a man attempting to incorporate all the discoveries of modern philosophy within a traditional Thomistic theory of knowledge. According to him all the researches of Kant and neo-Kantians such as Bergson had been anticipated by St. Thomas's definitions of the intelligence. Thus it is that D'Arcy considers Murry and other modern theorists to be drawing a false distinction when they claim to want 'something warm and pulsating while this Thomism is stiff and cold',¹⁶⁶ when they view Thomism 'as an abstract intellectual system which is as uncompromising and unbending as a straight-laced Victorian spinster; and they are convinced that these abstract philosophies always fade away into cloudiness when confronted with experience' (p.210). In actual fact, argues D'Arcy, 'to start with the idea that Thomism is a medieval product, a work of art to be gazed at with admiration and curiosity and kept intact in a museum – is to mistake everything' (p.215). Thomism is not an anachronistic philosophy relegated, as Dawson had ironically put it,

'to the limbo of dead systems', for 'all that Mr. Middleton Murry includes in his two factors, intuition and reason, fall within the intelligence as understood by St. Thomas, for the reason that the same problem confronted the medievals as tortures the modern lover of synthesis' (p.215). From this premise D'Arcy continues his vindication of Thomism as an essential philosophy for the Modernist thinker:

The sole difference between other Augustinian writers and modern writers like Bergson, and let us add Mr. Murry, and St. Thomas, is that the latter made what to many seems a far more profound analysis of the 'faculties of the soul', and because of that analysis made a synthesis which gave to intellect the primacy even in the enjoyment of God, and grouped within that form of life which is intellect, abstraction, sympathy and intuition. (pp.215-216)

Covered by the Thomistic theory of knowledge, the modern concepts of intuition and sympathy are, as with Eliot, considered to be species of the genus intellect. This being the case, argues D'Arcy, even an admission of the privations traditionally associated with the Thomistic philosophy cannot alter its contemporary relevance – for such accusations have not taken into account the implicit significances of the intellect. D'Arcy furnishes an apology for St. Thomas's occasional tendency to asceticism; but, he continues, this should not detract from the flexibility his intellectualist epistemology is able to offer:

there is therefore some ground of complaint against St. Thomas, that he shut himself up with his concepts and ignored experience; and if, indeed, he identified intelligence with the abstractions of reason then we would have to go afield for some other activity outside intelligence to satisfy our wants. But whatever his practice occasionally may have been, his theory is certain, and in that theory intelligence covers far more than abstraction. (p.220)

Therefore, maintains D'Arcy, 'the Thomist agrees with Bergson that the reason is abstractive, that it is unequal to the task of seizing the concrete reality in all its warm and fresh individuality. This failure of the reason is, however, not a modern discovery' (p.224). D'Arcy depreciatingly suggests that Kant's great discovery is pre-empted by Thomistic researches, whereas, in fact, it is clear that by ultimately giving primacy to a theological conception of the intellect instead of any non-conceptual, indeterminate function that it may have, he is favouring a metaphysical interpretation. If the Thomist is aware of reason's inability to comprehend itself, it is because he posits

the impossibility of explaining its relation to a transcendent final cause, and not because he considers its psychologically complex structure to be inexplicable *in itself*:

man in being a rational animal shares something with God the supreme architypal [sic] intelligence, but that he carries it in an earthen vessel. Therefore his light is fitful and imperfect; it grows through the material provided by his senses, and the object has to be abstracted from its sensible integument. Abstract thinking is the law of his imperfect being; he desires intuition, and the fact of his desire points to a higher mode of thought in which his ideal is realized, but he himself is fobbed off with ideas, makeshifts, pieces. He is on the confines of the spiritual order, and to use de Lammenais' great image he has a foot in the material and the spiritual and he is drawn asunder not by four horses but by two worlds. (p.224)

For D'Arcy, Thomism 'opens out the modern conception of experience by delineating what character the supreme degree of that experience must take. This ideal experience it assigns to God' (p.226). This it does by means of the intellect which participates in abstract thinking, the 'law of [man's] imperfect being'. Man attempts to discover absolute knowledge intuitively but this is a possibility only for the divine. Therefore the intellect affords an impartial and obfuscated representation of all that man cannot attain. This leads D'Arcy towards a briefly sympathetic consideration of another possible direction for the reason – inwards – which he curtails, again with reference to a servile intuition, whose purpose is not creative, but whose nature is instrumental in reducing the bitterness of the conceptual pill the intellect must swallow:

Given then such a theory of intelligence, one can without too much difficulty, I think, fit in that feeling of unrest which makes literary folk turn to some other shrine than reason, and it would be part of Thomism to show how perception and art and the knowledge by sympathy or connaturality, fall within the theory of knowledge. Perception is the bastard intuition, art and kindred activities are the quasi-intuition, they are the means which the soul takes to get round the weakness of the reason. (p.225)

Art and perception serve as forms of intuition which momentarily beguile the intellect into believing it has some creative capacity of its own. They represent illegitimate attempts at divine creation constrained, finally, by a proper subservience to the hieratic intellect whose authority is in turn delegated from metaphysical bounds. Nonetheless, despite this relegation, in which the conceptual life of the intellect takes precedence over a non-conceptual faculty concerned with the direct data of experience – the immediately

prehended, contingent world proper to the intuition – D'Arcy is still prepared to argue the contemporary worth of the Thomistic synthesis: 'The argument starts indifferently from experience or the necessary principles of being; it can therefore be either psychological or metaphysical, and a synthesis which is so complete that experience and metaphysics combine harmoniously is so rare that no wonder Thomism makes disciples even to-day' (p.226). D'Arcy's view that Thomism starts indifferently either from psychology or metaphysics contradicts his own exclusive interpretation in which the conceptual life of the intellect takes clear precedence over the subjective activities of the intuition.

D'Arcy's theory is partially echoed by Ramon Fernandez who claimed, one month later, that 'in my opinion one can take one's place "in the party of the Intelligence" and yet at the same time concede to Intuition a great value and a certain originality: for the good reason, as I think, that intuition is intimately connected with intelligence'.¹⁶⁷ He attempts to show that the type of intuition of which Murry speaks 'which has its origin in Kant and Bergson' (p.333) and which 'signifies at once "concrete presentation, actually given reality" and immediate penetration of reality' (p.333) is, in fact, 'perfectly compatible with discursive intelligence, and...that the knowledge contained in it is of the nature of reasoning' (p.333). Therefore, applying these conclusions to aesthetic practice, it will be recognized that the poet 'offers us the concrete side of fact, vision, rhythm, affective emanation, etc., but as we discern through it the abstract side, the idea of this reality attaches itself to the prehension of this reality' (p.337).

Ramon Fernandez's philosophy stands undecided between Murry's internalized, psychological synthesis and D'Arcy's barely disguised intellectualism. Reality is prehended intuitively and that intuition is then referred to by the intelligence, but this conception of the intelligence is not one which carries the authority of which D'Arcy speaks; neither, conversely, is that intelligence subject to 'revivification' by the intuition as in Murry's thesis. Fernandez notes a vacillation between the Cartesian definition of intuition as an 'immediate intellectual evidence without the mediation of any reasoning' (p.333), and its more modern conception as an immediate, concrete perception of reality: 'When we analyse carefully the mental state which is nowadays called intuition, we note that it shows an odd mixture of Cartesian evidence and of intuition in the second sense of the term: precisely, an appearance or a prevision of intellectual evidence conveyed by the feeling of immediate contact with reality' (pp.333-334). Although the theorist claims that 'I have never held that qualitative intuition was more than one of a hundred means at the command of the intelligence for getting into contact and compromise with the real' (pp.337-338), there is certainly enough contention

provided by his interest in purely psychological conceptions of this faculty to have Eliot querying whether in fact Fernandez is a Bergsonian and a pragmatist who, 'by positing *personality* as the ultimate, the fundamental reality in the universe, is really supporting or undermining that "moral hierarchy" of which he, as well as Mr. Read, is so stout a champion'.¹⁶⁸

Eliot anticipates, quite correctly, an attempt to undermine the 'moral hierarchy' of which he amongst other early Modernists was an unrelenting exponent. By questioning a Thomistic epistemology which provided, through its insistence upon the aseity of the intellect, philosophical and aesthetic justifications of such a hierarchy, theorists such as Herbert Read, Jacques Maritain and, perhaps, Fernandez could rediscover for art and poetry the definition of a new humanism – one established by reclaiming the properly subjective elements of a Kantian dialectic which had been polemically deployed by Thomists in the service of a quasi-modern, transcendental and ethical conception of the intellect. The greatest irony is afforded by the fact that, indulging in such dialectical sophistry, the reversal of emphasis defining this philosophical and aesthetic discourse might take place in the compass of one philosopher's work. This was the case with Jacques Maritain, whose influence on David Jones, the exemplary figure of the concluding chapter, was paramount.

CHAPTER FIVE

DAVID JONES IN CONTEXT

5.1 Introduction

It is only comparatively recently that the poet and painter David Jones (1895-1974) has come to be regarded as a figure of real importance to British Modernism, a fact that may be attributed in great part to the lack of an illuminating critical context in which his endeavours might be properly viewed. Indeed, even when his importance as a poet and painter is recognized and his unjustified obscurity noted, critics seem reticent to analyse his efforts in terms of the wider theoretical changes of the time and thus commit him once again to his traditionally peripheral position. A fine example of this is provided by one of Jones's chief commentators, David Blamires, who writes in 1989 that, owing to the fact that he was 'a loner, ploughing his own furrow and belonging to no recognizable school, many of those writing about British art and poetry of the twentieth century have tended to relegate him to a footnote or simply to mention his name *en passant*. Nonetheless, like Blake, his contribution to both the visual arts and poetry is of the highest order'.¹⁶⁹ Blamires, having stressed the importance of Jones to the twentieth century, does not relegate him to a footnote, nor does he mention him in passing; instead he searches for an analogical figure who takes his subject out of a twentieth-century context altogether. A comparison between William Blake and David Jones would have been considerably more pertinent had it introduced Blake as a figure whom Jones, Nash, Piper, Read, Grigson, Pevsner and others had deliberately appraised for the dialectical and Romantic content of his thought. For then, rather than being conceived as an isolated gnostic functioning out of time, David Jones would be seen very much as belonging to the school of thought described herein, and which sought to move the art and poetry of the twentieth century forward.

The critical eclipse of David Jones, a poet sensitive to the dialectical nature of the tradition which has been thus far detailed, returns to my original thesis that only one aspect of Modernism has come to be regarded as valid. Critics, expecting the hieratic obscurity conceived to be paradigmatic of Modernism, are bewildered at Jones's work precisely because he pursues a form of expression whose underlying philosophy offers a dialectical complement to abstraction. Missing this point, criticism has regarded David Jones as a late emissary of impersonal Anglo-Catholic apologetics after the early

fashion of T.S. Eliot or, perhaps, an even less timely expositor of *fin de siècle* medievalism, caught up with Eric Gill and similarly hermetic eccentrics in the death throws of an etiolated arts and crafts movement. Sometimes, as demonstrated by Blamires, he is treated in isolation and termed a visionary after the manner of William Blake, sometimes as an Edwardian war poet who only published his first work about the Great War as late as 1937 because he found that he could no longer paint.

To an extent, all these interpretations contain an element of truth. But David Jones appears a much more significant poet and artist when considered as a man who knew precisely the direction he intended to forge for the Modernist tradition; who realized that the period of abstractionism which had initiated the movement he was to continue had as its basis a dialectical inspiration from which he could rescue an implicit anthropomorphism. David Jones conducted British Modernism from its early anti-humanism towards a new 'creaturely' lyricism in which an empathic correspondence between man and the natural world was of paramount importance, and according to which it was no longer solely the intellect which held responsibility for creative operations, but also the imagination or, to use a term beloved of Maritain, the creative intuition.

5.2 Interpreting David Jones: Two Views of Modernism

David Jones's poetry appears critically confusing when it is read according to definitions of Modernism formulated around the principles of abstraction. When it is read in the context of a dialectical progression from such principles, these ambiguities are resolved. This fact can be illustrated by referring to two such respective interpretations. The first and more recent perspective, upheld by Jonathan Miles, cannot reconcile David Jones's interest in the metaphysical epistemology of neo-Thomism with the equal emphasis he places upon the subjectivist philosophies of late German Romantics such as Spengler. Conversely, an earlier interpretation, made at the height of Jones's creative powers by Herbert Read, is able to state as typical the artist's attempt to articulate precisely this unity of abstract and naturalistic ideas.

Jonathan Miles cites an important, yet to him apparently anomalous, principle from the poet's copy of Maritain's *The Philosophy of Art*: 'Art, in so far as ordered to Beauty, does not, at least when its object permits, stop at forms or at colours, nor at sounds, nor at words taken in themselves and *as things*, but it takes them also as making known other things than themselves, that is to say *as signs*.'¹⁷⁰ Miles goes on

to say that, 'while this may prove difficult to reconcile with the abstract practices of the twentieth century, this notion of compounded signification is particularly important in relation to Jones's work for he attempted to fashion recessive signs that revealed multiple signification'.¹⁷¹

The critic suggests a disparity between the aesthetic principles upheld by Maritain and David Jones and the criteria he offers by way of defining British Modernism. His puzzlement centres around how the poet is able to hold as axiomatic the view that art is primarily abstract – exists as the 'thing-in-itself' which criticism takes to be an accepted tenet of Modernist theory – whilst simultaneously exclaiming its capacity to communicate compound significances which extend into the flux of experience and 'recede' into the depths of psychology. How can the critically sanctioned idea that Modernism aspires to ontology, intends to resolve its forms as an inviolable aspect of an immutable and theological order of being, correspond with the apparently contradictory notion that it exists in another capacity apart from such objectivism, a relativistic capacity significant of all the subjective criteria of psychology and the contingencies of intuitively apprehended experience – of the *numina* of place, the *genius* of culture and the *personality* of the poet?

Miles's uneasiness in defining this dualism carries over into his chapter on Oswald Spengler's influence upon David Jones. He suggests that 'it might perhaps be assumed from Jones's insistence that the process of making is distinct from any moral or political question that he had slight regard for the importance placed by Spengler on the idea of site' (p.42). Miles recognizes the importance of 'site' to Jones but once again is unable to locate a coherent link between the Thomistic idea of art belonging to the extra-spatial intellect – an idealistic formation of the reason alone – and Spengler's Romantic conception that it is related to the spirit of a particular time and place, that it is dependent upon empirical, sensuous conditions. To Miles this remains paradoxical, an anomaly – despite which fact he draws attention to a passage in Maritain's *Philosophy of Art* revealingly annotated by Jones with 'three bloody cheers':

Art as such is superior to time and place, it transcends, like the intelligence, every limitation of nationality...by its very nature and by its very object it is universal.

But Art has not its home in an angelic intelligence, it is subjectivised in a soul which is the substantial form of a living body; and this substantial form, by its natural need of learning and of perfecting itself by degrees and with difficulty, turns the animal it inhabits into an animal by nature political. In this way Art is fundamentally dependent on all that city and race, spiritual

tradition and history bring to the body and the intelligence of mankind. By reason of its subject and of its roots it is of a particular age and of a particular country.¹⁷²

According to this conception of Thomism, art does not exist in a purely abstract relation to experience, but is 'significant' of multiple and immediately prehended realities not objectively resolved by the *a priori* demands of a theologically inclined and subjectively disinterested intellect. Jones sanctions Maritain's belief that although art does indeed have a claim to universality, its metaphysical import can only be realized according to the conditions of the artist as a man. These conditions include not only his personality, but the various contexts within which it is developed: 'the contactual is essential. You have to have been there'.¹⁷³ The religious principle which lends art its form is realized immanently, or intuitively, rather than transcendently.

Jonathan Miles overlooks the debt owed by Maritain and Jones to the Kantian thesis which provides the real foundation of their philosophy of art. If an assumption is made that the neo-Thomistic theories of intelligence promulgated by Modernism are a pure reprise of traditional metaphysics rather than, as is actually the case, a sophisticated revision of Kantian subjectivism, the implicit Romanticism of statements made by ostensibly Thomist thinkers such as Maritain will beguile the critic. David Jones, whose aesthetic derives in large part from Maritain, will seem equally out of joint with the ascetic tenets he might be expected to hold as an exponent of Thomism. The ideas of a recessive compound signification and the psychological importance of place confuse the commentator who is unable to identify the dialectical basis of the theories employed by the subject of his study: theories which include the notion of intuition as much as intellect and whose relation to the doctrines of St. Thomas often hold little more than a nominal value. David Jones's poetry and painting, contrary to Miles's opinion, is not 'difficult to reconcile with the abstract practices of the twentieth century' once it is realized that the concept of abstraction informing his expression has its basis in a much less simplistic philosophy than many critics are in the habit of assuming. As Jones states of his own views during the 1930s:

It was the 'cornering', the restrictive use of the term 'abstract' that I felt to be regrettable because misleading. It is always difficult when one can see certain developments have come about by a complex of historical causes and the validity of which one can recognize, but the 'labels' or 'aims' of which, even while asserting a truth, are restricted to a particular approach and one suspects that this will, in turn, be used as a surrogate for sensitivity and genuine creativity, as ersatz, in its own way, as the banalities of any decayed academism.¹⁷⁴

By turning to Herbert Read's critical appraisal of David Jones, a view can be established whereby the subjective and Romantic tendencies of his work are seen to be perfectly compatible within the context of British Modernism. Herbert Read posits as a general characteristic of the British artist not the impersonal abstractions recommended by the dogmatic intellectualism of Hulme and Eliot, but 'styles which spring from introspective and personalistic moods',¹⁷⁵ and which 'are in both the critical and historical sense romantic by nature' (p.39). He concludes that 'the genius of our greatest painters and architects no less than of our greatest poets was always romantic. In that sense the general trend of contemporary art may be interpreted as a return to our romantic tradition' (p.39). In support of his general contention that the modern idiom is by no means incompatible with the Romantic interiority of the artist, that geometric abstraction is itself significant of a particular psychological or emotional state, he quotes from a letter written by David Jones, whom he importantly considers 'one of our most subtle naturalistic painters' (p.36, n).

In this letter Jones draws a crucial distinction between abstraction as a necessary and inescapable formal consideration which may still be reconciled with the exigencies of personality and, conversely, a rigorously ascetic conception which, remembering Maritain's critique of Eliot, concludes the ineluctable formal purpose in a self-conscious 'desiccation of the heart':

Those of us whose work no one, I imagine, would call 'abstract', know, nevertheless, that it is an abstract *quality*, however hidden or devious, which determines the real worth of any work. This is true of Botticelli's *Primavera*, of the White Horse of Uffington, of the music of Monteverdi, Of *Finnegans Wake*, of the 'Alfred Jewel', of the glass goblet I am now trying to draw, of the shape of a liturgy, of the shape of a tea-cup. The one common factor implicit in all the arts of man resides in a certain juxtaposing of forms.

In theory 'abstract art' is no more than a conscious assertion of this truth. It is then the assertion, in isolation, of a real, and indeed a first, principle. The least 'abstract' work (in the contemporary sense) could not be made apart from this principle, for without it a 'thing' having integration and a life of its own, could not be. Therefore without it the arts could not be. With this clearly understood we may then be in a better position to consider what possible aridities or impoverishments may or may not attend, or be latent in, the practice of what is called 'pure abstraction' among us to-day.¹⁷⁶

David Jones cites abstraction as a principle determining the worth of any work of art, whether it be non-representational or naturalistic. By making this generalized and all

inclusive point, he attempts to free abstraction from interpretations which suggest that it belongs to a rarefied vocabulary of form whose claim to metaphysical aseity excludes all other considerations: the world of 'pure abstraction'. This is another way of saying that, although art does indeed participate in universals, it is able to do so without relegating the equally important field of human activity; indeed, it is through precisely these anthropological activities that the religious principle is attained. To this end, Herbert Read conjectures that even the most abstract of contemporary British works attain their spiritual significance through the participation of subjective agencies:

This abstract development may seem to have taken us far from that general return to native tradition which...I gave as the most general characteristic of our art to-day. But it might be argued that a painter like Ben Nicholson has retreated even more violently into the past, for the nearest analogy to his geometrical abstractions is to be found in the formal ornament of our Celtic manuscripts. I do not believe that Ben Nicholson himself is conscious of any such resemblance, or is in any sense a reactionary artist. But it is possible that art has a certain relationship to magic, or, to express the idea in more fashionable terms, it is possible that the artist, in the degree that he achieves an integration of his personality through the medium of art, does so by making contact with those forces which Freud has called man's archaic heritage, and which Jung has called the collective unconscious.¹⁷⁷

Modernist abstraction within British shores, according to the above proposition, draws upon the psychological forces comprising an indigenous Romantic tradition. It signifies not a break with the past in search of something new, but returns to the encoded, passionate material of an archaic heritage. Ben Nicholson's art, rather than doing service to the cubistic anamorphism of Picasso and Braque, celebrates the internal world of a collective unconscious which has its genesis in the mystical and indeterminate territories of Celticity. If this is an inspirational structure of which Nicholson remains unconscious, the same cannot be said of David Jones. Impatient of intellectual abstractions, the invocation of the Celtic muse becomes for him an essential creative requisite.

5.3 The Synthesis of Intellect and Intuition

Herbert Read includes David Jones in his résumé of twentieth-century Romantic artists and does so by citing the poet's own assertion that abstraction is by no means

incompatible with an art seeking to express the qualities of nature and experience. The universal proceeds from, and does not exclude, the particular: the sign, which is significant of its own formal integrity, also speaks of a basis in experience. Jonathan Miles's original 'difficulty' in reconciling two apparently disparate principles is given a philosophical structure which the poet articulates in familiar form:

(1) We are told, or we conclude, that man is a 'moral' being, which means for reasons already discussed that he is a 'religious' being.

(2) We know that we make things. We know this for certain and without reflection. To make things is our day by day activity. We infer from this that man is a maker. On reflection we feel able to define man as a maker of things. On investigation we find that this has been his characteristic unbroken activity for some tens of milleniums, perhaps for much longer.

If what we are told or conclude is true (as stated in (1) above) and unless we are deluded with respect to what we 'know' (as stated in (2) above), then it follows as of absolute necessity that there adheres to man's making a 'religious' something.¹⁷⁸

In this variation on a theme of Kant's 'antinomy of taste', David Jones identifies man's natural inclination to make things gratuitously. It is a 'day by day activity', it is a commonplace, an unthinking activity that lies at the root of all that man is – 'we know this for certain and without reflection'. But Jones also identifies the purposive nature of the human mind, notes that 'this creature, because he is endowed with rationality (i.e. has a "rational soul") must have a supernatural end' (p.147). Jones, holding these positions to be equally true, concludes that the gratuitous and immediate act of making is necessarily and synthetically linked to a religious principle. An act that is contingent and local is charged with a universal significance inscrutably connected to the divine act of creation: 'As it is, concept and universality are married to the local and the particular. The marriage is secret (which has a bearing on the question of "obscurity") but by it, all is achieved, and that by a positively text-book specimen of *Ars est celare artem*.'¹⁷⁹

The art object, or indeed the poem, exists both ontologically and anthropomorphically: as both a 'thing-in-itself' and an expression significant of the creative subject. Thus Jones speaks of the 'fragments' composing *The Anathemata* as

the donated and votive things, the things dedicated after whatever fashion, the things in some sense made separate, being 'laid up from other things'; things, or some aspect of them, that partake of the extra-utile and of the gratuitous; things that are the signs of something other, together with

those signs that not only have the nature of a sign, but are themselves, under some mode, what they signify.¹⁸⁰

Although the poem utilizes signs which, referring to their own abstract value as 'things in themselves' are 'made separate' and 'dedicated' to a religious ideal, those signs or forms cannot escape their status as predicates of human experience. Again referring to *The Anathemata*, Jones claims that while 'biographical accidents are not in themselves any concern of, or interest to, the reader, they are noted here because they are responsible for most of the content and have had an overruling effect upon the form of this writing' (p.11). The 'form' of the writing, that which gives it its definition as an object – as a 'thing-in-itself' – is not determined apart from the personality of the author, but results from that very force. Personality is not committed to the singular task of providing a narrative content alone; it is also the fundamental formative principle of the work.

The significance of art is implicitly related to the dynamism of the creator, his personality and his emotion. In this respect Jones says of the poet's discipline that 'there must be no mugging-up, no "ought to know" or "try to feel"; for only what is actually loved and known can be seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. The muse herself is adamant about this: she is indifferent to what the poet may wish he could feel, she cares only for what he in fact feels' (p.24). The poet gauges experience without the mediation of the discursive intellect which, in its generation of concepts, transcends such emotional and sensual particularities. It is only when the creative imagination has established the primacy of autobiographical feeling, and not before, that it gains access to a wider significance, a purposiveness connecting all things in the natural world.¹⁸¹ Whereas strict Thomist principles dictate that art, being intellectual and 'abiding on the side of the mind', is able to claim an autonomy apart from the subjective and local conditions of its creator's existence – 'I can never see what my eye sees (sensibly) nor hear what my ear hears as vibration, I can only know rationally, by means of an image'¹⁸² – in David Jones's philosophy it concerns the senses as much as it resides on the side of the concept-forming mind:

Some deeply religious minds seem to regard these things, these signs and outward showings, as being necessary only because of an infirmity and because we require them as aids toward a spiritual state. They speak as though this sign-making were adjuvant only and a kind of concession to us because we have bodies. But this would appear to imply that the body was itself an infirmity or a kind of deprivation. Whereas the body is not an infirmity but a unique benefit and splendour; a

thing denied to angels and unconscious in animals. We are committed to body and by the same token we are committed to Ars, so to sign and sacrament.¹⁸³

So it is that Jones's painting as well as his writing is dense with an intuitively felt contact with experience. It is beautiful in an abstract sense, as an object in itself, but it is also a living compound of signs which deny stasis and which are in communication with the sensuous world. As Jones affirms 'we cannot escape the obligation of asserting as axiomatic that all art is "abstract" and that all art "re-presents"' (p.173). Likewise, although he can insist that in one sense 'the workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work',¹⁸⁴ he can at the same time aver that writing:

is about one's own 'thing', which *res* is unavoidably part and parcel of the Western Christian *res*, as inherited by a person whose perceptions are totally conditioned and limited by and dependent upon his being indigenous to this island. In this it is necessarily insular; within which insularity there are further conditionings contingent upon his being a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage, of Protestant upbringing, of Catholic subscription. (p.11)

The artist is obliged to impress upon his work all the intellectual and abstract considerations of form which lend an autonomy to that creation; yet all such rational considerations are themselves predicated on the emotions the poet has as a man, and these emotions are in turn related to, or even composed of, what Jones terms a *materia poetica*, or 'one's own thing' – an internal realm of collective cultural memories and volitions conditioned by time and place. The poet in his capacity as skilled *workman* may veto personal considerations, but that does not mean to say that his experience as a man will not inform the material he works upon. Quoting Browning, Jones can phrase his thesis thus: "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes! Man has For ever". True, but the works of man, unless they are of "now" and of "this place", can have no "for ever" (p.24).

5.4 Myth Precedes Intellect: Cognitive Metaphors

Jones claims that 'it is then the form-making which is also a sign-making that causes man's art to be bound to God'.¹⁸⁵ Yet this sign-world does not suspend subjective considerations in order to extend poetry into the abstractions of 'fact' and 'concept'. Conversely, before any claims can be made to universality, the artist must

commit himself to a journey inwards: the 'recessive' signification of which Jonathan Miles speaks. Only 'by the operations of a mind free to judge' (p.160), a mind putting into effect a subjective 'free-play' of the imagination, can a bridge be built which is truly able to reconcile man with divinity. The desire for signification, or sacramentalism, does not require any form of theological belief but is subjectively determined.¹⁸⁶ It is 'something to which man is of his nature unavoidably committed' (p.166), encoded in and proceeding from his own personality, rendering absurd 'the notion that sacrament is something added rather than something radical and inescapable' (p.166). Indeed, states Jones, the need for the 'extra-utile' and the sacramental is so bound up with experience and with life that 'if the "significatory" were wholly eliminated in every detail of our daily lives...we should appear as some genus other, if not of some other species'.¹⁸⁷

Jones gives this neo-Kantian philosophy his own metaphorical structure. Forms, he claims

partake in some sense, however difficult to posit, of that juxtaposing by which what was *inanis et vacua* became radiant with form and abhorrent of vacua by the action of the Artifex, the Logos, who is known to our tradition as the Pontifex who formed a bridge 'from nothing' and who then, like Brân in the *Mabinogion*, himself became the bridge by the Incarnation and Passion and subsequent Apotheoses.¹⁸⁸

Describing the teleological relation of forms to divinity, a task which, as in the Kantian thesis, is beyond the clarity of intellectual analysis, he refers to the use of a myth which 'seems a startling foreshadowing of what was achieved by the Incarnation' (p.160). It is the term 'foreshadowing' that requires emphasis in this context, for the poet uses primal, pre-Christian mythological 'deposits' in order to introduce an orthodox theological idea: mythology anticipates Christian doctrine, the indeterminate and the shadowy realms of the subconscious come before, and remain implicit in, the reasonable light of the intellect. Jones's use of Celtic mythology serves a purpose greater than the historical exploration and documentation of an elusive epoch. As well as this, it becomes for him synonymous with a certain aspect of cognition. Instead of using the idea of the Incarnation to explain how the spirit of God informs all the created things of the world, how, indeed He works through the artist to impress a form upon matter, Jones uses a mythological equivalent. In doing this he suggests that the bridge between man and universality is constructed not from an interplay of intellect and divine concept, but from an internalized mythology.

So it is that the myth of the bridge, which derives from the ancient tale of Bendigeidfran (or Brân) who bridged the Irish sea with his body to enable his army to cross, 'offers from remote Celtic antiquity a theme familiar to us in the Roman title Pontifex Maximus and the title Servus Servorum Dei' (p.160, n.1). The magical (and associative) quality of Celtic myth prefaces the intellectual Romano-Christian tradition; the psychologies of peripheral cultures endure the impositions of the imperial emissaries of light. At the core of Christian belief there exist sources which pre-date its classical and scholastic disciplines, just as in the structure of the mind the intellect is preceded by a mystical faculty of 'creative intuition'; just as, for instance, the celebrated Gothic cathedral reveals underneath its calibrated mechanics an earlier affiliation with the organic forms of the great Northern forests. It is interesting to note that in this last connection, Robert Graves in his 'historical grammar of poetic myth', *The White Goddess*, describes Brân's association with the cult of the alder tree. Brân crosses the Irish Sea from his ships to shore and then traverses the River Linon by respectively constructing a jetty and then a bridge built on alder piles. Graves associates this mythological construction with the fact that 'the earliest European houses were built on alder piles',¹⁸⁹ and 'so are several mediaeval cathedrals' (p.169). Referring to Arthurian myth, Jones reminds us that 'we are aware of unplumbed [sic] deeps and recessions below and beyond the medievalized and christianized story. Gusts drive down upon us through sudden rifts in the feudal vaulting, up through the Angevin floor; we stumble upon twisted roots of primeval growth among traceries of Gothic and Christian workmanship'.¹⁹⁰ Thus his painting of 1940, *Guinever* (Fig. 13), seems to dissolve its formal architectural setting back into a forest tangle just as the later *Vexilla Regis* (Fig. 2) would reveal, amongst its forest forms and its Roman and British pre-Christian buildings, signs of the new faith: doves circle the sky, nails puncture the monumental tree of crucifixion. As René Hague ventures, 'it should be pointed out that D. himself, by his use of *myth* and *mythus* in connection with the Mosaic and Christian tradition, blurs the essential distinction (to which he was fully alive) between pagan myth and Christian *revelation*'.¹⁹¹ The Christian idea of revelation is caused in Jones's philosophy of art to proceed from, and form an 'ideal reconciliation' with, pagan sources. Returning the analogy to cognitive terms, the intellect is preceded or modified by what Maritain would call the 'the pre-conscious life of the intellect', what Jung might term 'the collective unconscious', what Kant had originally named as the 'super-sensible substrate of humanity'.

The idea of a bridge between the domains of matter and spirit proceeds, in the beginning, from internalized and local sources, what might be termed mythological

sources; but literary mythological sources and the creative activities of the mind have for Jones a direct equivalence. The non-determined and non-rational life of the intellect might be supposed to be constituted of these collective, mythological deposits – they are our inescapable inheritance: ‘One thing at least the psychologists make plain: there is always a recalling, a re-presenting again, anaphora, anamnesis.’¹⁹² In his preface to *In Parenthesis*, and continually throughout the poem itself, Jones draws attention to the collective memories of the soldiers with whom he fought in the British army during the First World War:

Every man’s speech and habit of mind were a perpetual showing: now of Napier’s expedition, now of the Legions at the Wall, now of the ‘train-band captain’, now of Jack Cade, of John Ball, of the commons in arms. Now of *High Germany*, of *Dolly Gray*, of Bullcalf, Wart and Poins; of Jingo largenesses, of things as small as the Kingdom of Elmet; of Wellington’s raw shire recruits, of ancient border antipathies, of our contemporary, less intimate, larger unities, of *John Barleycorn*, of ‘sweet Sally Frampton’. Now of Coel Hên – of the Celtic cycle that lies, a subterranean influence as a deep water troubling, under every tump in this Island, like Merlin complaining under his big rock.¹⁹³

René Hague notes in this context that the imagination

touches the most important element in D.’s myth, the working of the human spirit upon the material provided by the universe – in doing which it draws upon or is guided by imponderables that lie deep in the individual or collective unconscious or subconscious – working in such a way as to produce that which is rightly called *made*, an artefact and not a mere fiction: or, if you so prefer it, a fiction which is an artefact (p.9)

Jones, in his own words, sought ‘that very recognizable thing, which can be sometimes felt in a few lines of a song, or, on occasion, in a single sentence of a language, when, in a flash, a whole inward world is given concrete expression. This thing can disclose itself in the most varied connections – humble or grand; in a mere fragment or a great building’.¹⁹⁴ Poetry, then, takes as its inspiration the collective ‘mythus, deposits, matière’ of a particular cultural inheritance; but this content is not the simple quarry of literary investigation, it is implicit in the formal configuration of the poetry itself, which in turn is related to the creative structure of the poet’s perceptive or apperceptive faculties:

We know – it goes without saying – that the question ‘What is the material of poetry?’ cannot be answered without some mention of these same deposits.

We know also, and even more certainly, that this applies to the question ‘By what means or agency is poetry?’ For one of the efficient causes of which the effect called poetry is a dependant involves the employment of a particular language or languages, and involves that employment at an especially heightened tension. The means or agent is a veritable torcular, squeezing every drain of evocation from the word-forms of that language or languages. And that involves a bagful of mythus before you’ve said Jack Robinson – or immediately after.¹⁹⁵

Mythology works on a level deeper than the conscious phrasing of a particular narrative – it is incarnate in the very forms of language which the poet employs. The formal activity of the poet consists in the use of words which reveal an interior significance: a significance related to the subconscious life of the poet and the radiances of the particular culture and site with whose associations that language is also imbued: ‘One is sometimes charged with a romantic rather than a realist attitude to these matters. But it is certainly no want of realism which makes one assert that the things of the Cymry are intricated in a rather special way with an historic language in an historic terrain.’¹⁹⁶ The ‘pastness’ of Wales is preserved in a significant language which is the poet’s inherited, intuitive medium, and which is in turn dynamically linked to an ‘historic terrain’. Jeremy Hooker draws attention to this same relationship:

In a haunting line in *Jerusalem*, Blake writes: ‘And Albion fled inward among the currents of his rivers’ (chapter I, section 19). The primal creative energy, temporarily defeated, takes refuge among forces that are part of the actual physical landscape. David Jones too restores a sense of contained dynamic power to the physical structure of the island, to its rivers and mountains. But for him it is essentially the same power that is locked in the signs themselves.¹⁹⁷

A sense of place depends as much upon an internalized geography as upon actual locale; indeed, for Jones the two are inseparable because what is ‘actually loved and know’ cannot be loved and known conceptually or analytically – intellectually – but can only be apprehended intuitively and empathically: the world and subjectivity are grasped together and are indivisibly phrased in the poetic utterance. We have noted Maritain’s claim that in terms of the linguistic significance of the modern poem ‘the sovereignty has shifted from the rational connections to the experiential and internal ones’.¹⁹⁸ So for Jones the description of experienced place must always and of

necessity involve a description of psychological and emotional territories; site has become part of his subjectivity, mapped out upon the various substrate of his mythological heritage:

This boundary stream, that mound, the scattered vestigial enclaves and their speech forms...this lime-washed, sacral enclosure; these dunes at the river mouth where no vestige remains but where once stood the *llys* at Aberffraw – ‘the principal seat’: so far by means as fragile, vulnerable and scarcely tangible, or wholly immaterial, as this and these the elusive things of Wales have, in a tattered and fragmentary sort of way, been tabernacled for us.¹⁹⁹

5.5 Modernity and ‘The Break’

In his ‘Notes on the 1930s’ David Jones cites James Joyce as the exemplary Modernist who, although ‘*thought of* by many as “a rebel” destructive of standards of all sorts, an enemy of tradition’²⁰⁰ was, in fact,

the artist who more than any other, not only employed as his *materia poetica* all that which those historical, mythological, anthropological, archaeological, etc., studies had to offer, plus the new researches into psychology of Freud, Jung etc., plus the abiding influence of the medieval scholastic modes of thought inseparable from his early years under the tuition of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in Ireland, plus a complete familiarity with the popular devotional practices of a peasantry *and* those practices transferred to the streets, slums, saloon bars, etc., of the city and port of Dublin, but also the artist who, more than any other, for all the universality of his theme, depended upon a given locality, for no man could have adhered with more absolute fidelity to a specified site, and the complex historic strata special to that site, to express a universal concept. It was from the *particular* that he made the *general* shine out. That is to say he was quintessentially ‘incarnational’. (p.46)

The criteria which Jones introduces in support of Joyce’s exemplary artistic merit is of considerable import to our discussion thus far. Mythology, anthropology and psychology combine with scholastic principles to produce an art in which universal truths are discovered intuitively, in a particular locality, by means of a particular language belonging to a particular people. The significance of Joyce’s form is not generated through the use of a logocentric poetic register intent upon the imposition of abstract concepts, but derives instead from an excavation of the ‘complex historic

strata' special to known site and immanent in the psyche and language of the poet and his compatriots. Art and poetry are not the depersonalized icons of abstract spirit working through the intellect to be impressed on matter, rather are they the resolution of the poet's interiority into a sign of both subjectivity and intentionality.

Jones considered the ideal synthesis of the universal and the particular to be under perpetual threat from the developments of modernity. He believed poetic language and the painter's vocabulary of symbols to be suffering the loss of their mythical significance, subject to a widening dichotomy in which they became increasingly abstracted from their meaningful relations to a subjective origination. The sign, instead of providing a dynamic link between its abstract status as 'thing-in-itself' and the experiential world, comes increasingly to hold only an abstract value, is cut off from its recessive and compound significances. Thus, for instance, the capacity of the logodædale James Joyce to reconcile 'an art-form showing an essential Celticity as intricate, complex, flexible, exact and abstract as anything from the visual arts of La Tène or Kells',²⁰¹ with 'an art-form in which the Celtic demands with regard to place, site, identity, are a hundred-fold fulfilled' (p.58), is reduced in relation to the growth of a 'placeless cosmopolis' (p.58) which pays no regard to the sources, constitution and context of the indigenous poetic volition.

David Jones terms this dichotomy 'The Break' and ventures as a causal factor the conception, gained from Spengler, of an increasing loss of 'culture' to 'civilization'. This includes, respectively, 'the whole perceptive, intuitive, instinctual, traditional and contemplative thing in contrast to the intellectualized, entirely cerebral, sharp-witted, uprooted, self-conscious, divorced-from-the-rhythm-of-nature tendency of the larger urban communities'.²⁰² According to Jones, 'clearly the norm should be a free exchange between the two' (p.87, n.16). The terms 'culture' and 'civilization' are related to epistemological polarities. An inauspicious geographical and demographic situation becomes synonymous with the pathological condition of a modern mind incapable of effecting a 'free exchange' between intuition and intellect: 'we all are of a dispersion and all are tending to an analogous disembodiment which may perhaps encourage a sharpening of the intelligence and a kind of heightening of the appreciative faculties at the expense of rootedness and locality-feeling' (p.89, n.18).

Jones details the 'whole tie-up of very ancient duration with site and locality, whereby terrain and nomenclature and the web of history are so intermixed as to be hardly patient of separation, even in the mind'.²⁰³ The persistence of place is inextricable from its geography, the linguistic or artistic terms of reference used to describe that place, and the history it accrues. Furthermore, all these various criteria

depend upon an implicit relation to the subjective mind: they are its intuitive material. Hence the dispossession of long enduring site by the forces of rapid change results in a crisis that must be measured in cognitive terms. When qualities comprising the mythological 'deposits' of a cultural heritage are supplanted by the anonymity of civilizational forces which appeal to the 'rootless' intellect, the artist is incapable of an empathic creation which speaks of either place or personality:

The technocracy in which we live is of its nature concerned with the purely utile, with what functions. This of necessity demands a preoccupation with the analytical, with formulae that have as their end the furthering of devices that serve a definable purpose and are in no sense made as *signa* of something other than themselves.

As the artist is concerned precisely with making things that are *signa* of some otherness (no matter what) his works would appear to have no essential and crucial place in such a situation were the matter carried to its logical conclusion.²⁰⁴

That which distinguishes man from the rest of the animal kingdom, his synthetic ability to create non-reflectively and at the same time votively, to create a system of signs predicated on an immediately felt relation to experience which in turn links him to a universal stratum of meaning, is stalled by a civilizational situation. The production of purely utile objects dislocated from a sensual and psychological relation to experience, things significant of nothing other than their own self-reflexive, abstract function, replaces the pleasurable creation of extra-utile forms significant of both emotion and sublimity. The production of things anathema (cursed) displaces that of things 'anathemata' (dedicated).

'The Break' displays itself most tellingly in the aesthetic act, where there is a lesion between the principles whose synthesis it had hitherto secured. The dilemma is most visible in the plastic arts, Jones maintains, as 'they are the forms where man normally and historically most commonly conjoined matter and spirit, and which most naturally and of necessity have borne the stamp of locality and displayed the whole inner feeling of corporate ways of life'.²⁰⁵ Poetry and music are not so immediately affected owing to their more intellectual nature. Jones remembers Maritain's dictum that 'they seem to abide more easily "on the side of the mind" and are perhaps less obviously troubled by the duality we have mentioned' (p.91). Still, no art is so abstract, or appeals so greatly to the purely rational intellect alone, that it escapes the influence of its contextual situation:

The interior structure, the technical devices, the concepts and ideas and all the morphology of the art of poetry can be maintained in all kinds of circumstances – in a world very other from that in which the poetry is written – but even so certain essential lines of communication cannot indefinitely be lengthened, still less severed. For poetry like any other art has to preserve liaison with the actual, the bodily, the visible – and these necessarily involve the contemporary scene. (p.91)

Thus, according to Jones, we find it impossible to comprehend Joyce and Picasso not because their work is abstract *per se*, but because the potency of these artists ‘resides to a great extent (to a crucial and overwhelming extent with Joyce) on the continued validity of a whole unbroken past’,²⁰⁶ a past from which which contemporary man finds himself increasingly alienated. And the notion of an ‘unbroken past’ is not one which may be spoken of solely in material terms; as well as being determined according to geographical or political conditions such as the industrialization of landscape or the political marginalization of distinct cultures, an intact historical sense depends upon a seamless cognitive operation – one relying upon a fluent interior stream of mythological sources: ‘almost all the motifs employed depend upon some apperception of that continuous sign-making which is an entailed inheritance, coming to us from our remote forebears’ (p.181). The artistic motifs employed by Picasso and Joyce depend upon an ‘apperception’ of continuous sign making; that is, given that this sign making is the creative elaboration of a mind which discovers within its own structure and content the emotional material of its own ‘entailed inheritance’, any reduction of that creative apperception necessarily entails a reduction of man’s connection with the sign-stream which defines him.

Appropriating the neo-Thomistic tenet that ‘the artist is not a special kind of man, but every man is a special kind of artist’,²⁰⁷ Jones could draw an equivalence between the increasing production of the purely utile object in modern industrial civilization and abstractionism in the arts, for art is simply the making of significant things and, as Joyce made clear, ‘comprehends all our activities from boat-building to poetry’.²⁰⁸ Man, necessarily an artist, when denied a world close and familiar to him, is forced into the creation of objects no longer significant beyond themselves and therefore incapable of purporting sublimity through the re-presentation of things actually loved and known. In the same way that abstract art signifies an inviolable, incommunicable absolute, so the utile object remains closed to any possibility of reconciling humanity with a spiritual principle. The bridge between the intuitively and intellectually known suffers collapse.

This is the subject of Jones's short poem 'A, a, a, Domine Deus'.²⁰⁹ The poet has spent time trying to come to terms with civilization and the privations of its correspondingly abstract aesthetic. He is a poet who is desperately unsure of what or how to create: 'I said, Ah! what shall I write?', he is a poet who has 'looked for a long while/ at the textures and contours'. He has felt 'trivial intersections' and has 'journeyed among the dead forms', he has 'tired the eyes of the mind/ regarding the colours and lights' and has 'tested the inane patterns/ without prejudice'. The poet has attempted to find some sense of correspondence or empathy with these abstract patterns, has been guarded 'not to condemn the unfamiliar'. He is aware that these lifeless forms are linked to this 'unfamiliar' situation; he patiently tries to derive some significance from them, 'For it is easy to miss Him/ at the turn of a civilisation'. But the poet is unable to communicate through these forms with divinity; they do not allow the universal concept to be incarnate or, indeed realized, in familiar and sensibly known things. The colours and lights tire the intellect for the precise reason that the poet cannot 'see the Living God projected from the Machine', his situation denying such immanent correspondence. Contemporary civilization, after all, demands that "the wheels go round" not "significantly", not as *signa* of something other, but with maximum utilitarian effectiveness'.²¹⁰

Jones describes the problem in further detail. He starts from the premise that 'we feel justified in calling this creature man not only the supreme utilitist but the only extra-utilitist, or sacramentalist' (p.178). Man, like other creatures, performs acts directed towards a particular finite, practical end. He also performs acts which, although gratuitous, local, subjective and intuitive, link him to a matrix of connections and significances forming a sublime 'substrate of humanity'. An inclination towards the 'extra-utile' is not interchangeable with an escapist desire for abstractions; conversely, it is an active and instinctive desire for creation which provides us with a definition of what it is to be human – 'We were then *homo faber, homo sapiens* before Lascaux and we shall be *homo faber, homo sapiens* after the last atomic bomb has fallen.'²¹¹ It is the utility characterizing the acts and artefacts of civilizational man which renders them intellectual abstractions, void of human significance. And this fact 'lands us back to our original contention, that the nature of man demands the sacramental. If he's denied the deep and the real, he'll fall for the trivial, even for the ersatz; but have it, he will'.²¹² In an ideal situation, such utile and extra-utile qualities might co-exist. Such, indeed, was case with the men of the Gothic age, who

were in love with the mechanistic. Gadgets had for them a special fascination. Revolving lecterns and the like appealed to their childish minds. Yet the Cathedral of Chartres alone is sufficient evidence that with them the utile and the extra-utile were indissolubly wed: there was no diriment impediment to that union. The men who assiduously applied themselves to the technics without which the stone could not have climbed so high to canopy the Sacrament were the same men who, by the same addiction to the technological, figured out the weight behind the pull of the arbalest: a gadget of formidable utility indeed, which the ban-the-bomb clerics of that day considered too utile by half. (p.179)

The abstract technics required to construct the exterior of the cathedral are responsible for the formation of an extra-utile interior space which mediates divine truths. Implicit in the finite and utile form is an extended significance: the mechanics of the roof form a canopy for the truths of the sacrament. The structure exists both in abstract (external) relation to nature and then as an intentional form communicating universal significance in a natural, intuitively accessible medium. When the utile and the extra-utile combine to form this one perfect reconciliation we are given Hegel's paradigmatic definition of Romantic art, and revisit the ecclesiological metaphor:

although the vault does in fact rest on pillars, their purpose of supporting the vault is not expressly emphasized and presented independently. It is as if they were not supports at all; compare a tree – its boughs do not seem to be carried by the trunk; on the contrary in their form, rather like an easy curve, they look like a continuation of the trunk and with the leaves of other trees form a roof of foliage.²¹³

Hegel claimed of the Gothic building that 'it has and displays a definite purpose; but in its grandeur and sublime peace it is lifted above anything purely utilitarian into an infinity in itself' (II, 685). But this is not the case with the structure at the beginning of *The Anathemata* where a 'cult man', who is 'late in time', 'stands alone in Pellam's land' and performs the Mass. Pellam's land is the waste land of civilization, the land of abstract form, the land which must be recharged with a sense of sacred life. The cult man's problems in trying to 'lift up an efficacious sign' in an unfamiliar environment hostile to association and significance is detailed with reference to the irrepressible architectural metaphor:

These, at the sagging end and chapter's close, standing
humbly before the tables spread, in the apsidal houses, who
intend life:

between the sterile ornaments
under the pasteboard baldachins
as, in the young-time, in the sap-years:
between the living floriations
under the leaping arches.

(Ossific, trussed with ferric rods, the failing numina
of column and entablature, the genii of spire and triforium,
like great rivals met when all is done, nod recognition across
the cramped repeats of their dead selves.)

These rear-guard details in their quaint attire, heedless of
incongruity, unconscious that the flanks are turned and all
connecting files withdrawn or liquidated – that dead symbols
litter to the base of the cult-stone, that the stem by the palled
stone is thirsty, that the steam is very low. (pp.49-50)

Jones presents an architectural vision of dead, abstract form. A church once alive with significance and organic vitality – more a forest than a church – becomes 'trussed' and 'ossific', its sign stream 'very low'. The sensuousness of spiritual expression becomes petrified with 'the utile infiltration', the non-sensual, non-intuitive and non-empathic. For an image of the building before such loss of significance, we may again refer to Hegel: 'Enter the interior of a medieval cathedral, and you are reminded less of the firmness and mechanical appropriateness of load-carrying pillars and a vault resting on them than of the vaultings of a forest where in lines of trees the branches incline to one another and quickly meet' (II, 688). Here the cathedral does not, as in Jones's description, reveal its tyrannical system of mechanical abstractions 'trussing' the numinous columns and the 'genii of spire and triforium' which concede defeat 'across the cramped repeats of their dead selves', but evokes a forest whose vitality and growth forms an animate cathedral, whose nave consists of trees which do not nod a recognition of their own ossification but whose vault is formed by the vivid meeting of their branches.

Similarly, committing himself to the view that art is achieved by the 'single-eyed, vocation-integrity of chance individuals', or, more importantly in this context, 'the chance corporate awakening to an unassuageable will to form in a whole culture', Jones concedes – with a magnanimity not displayed by Enoch Powell on the same subject – that 'the Norman panzer-gangs are forgiven for the sake of the astonishing freedom by which the Norman vision made the stone leap-frog in the under-crofts and with slow-motion embrace the round apses'.²¹⁴ The invaders and disruptionists of an established culture – proto-Nazi's ringing in civilizational change – may be forgiven an aesthetic indulgence which, far from seeming mechanical and impersonal, achieves an organic grace that would appear to contradict their anti-humanist intentions: 'We are forcibly reminded of how Phryne's judges forgot her crime-sheet, awed by the splendour of form accidentally present in the body of the accused' (p.99). In the case of the Normans, such 'splendour of form' is considered merely accidental. But an 'unassuageable will to form' can be implicitly splendid and anthropologically meaningful given the correct situation:

What 'Westminster Abbey' evokes for some of us, may, in Wales, have its nearest and partial analogy in some given tract of the actual land itself, but with this crucial difference: The tract in question may be an enclave harbouring a long-rooted, living community with a living language and tradition offering links with the Britain known to Germanus of Auxerre and with echoes of a Britain far anterior again.²¹⁵

5.6 The Retrieval of Origins

'The Break' dislocates man's synthetic capacity to create signs which are able to merge interior and exterior truths into one form of expression. An attempt to retrieve for the creative mind the psychological realms from which it found itself increasingly exiled becomes the same task for Jones as the rediscovery of the besieged and dispossessed Celtic peripheries in the past and in the present. His poetry attempts the excavation of culture from beneath the forms of civilization as surely as it seeks to plumb the many layers of mythological strata running deep below the intellect. If a community is rooted in the living present, responding intuitively to a surrounding environment which has suffered no traumatic 'situational' changes, and is therefore connected to the continuing significance of the past, its poetry, art or architecture will itself be living and vital: it will be indistinguishable from the entire experience of that

community. A cathedral in the ever changing center of an impersonal metropolis may have as its 'long-rooted' Celtic equivalent a landscape which is still as much of an interior realm as it is a palpable tract subject to the mathematical demarcations of the cartographer and the planner. The many strata of the artist's geological inheritance finds an equivalence in his psychology, which in turn finds expression in his will to form. The land is full of intent and meaning, it is a directory of past events congruent with the collective cultural memories of its inhabitants:

For the artist the thing called 'the past' is very much what the thing called 'nature' is to him, viz.—something which he uses when he 'shows forth', 'recalls', 're-presents' and 'discovers'. For such is his task, whatever the mode, species or nature of the signs employed.

So the 'past' can no more than 'nature' be precluded from his data. *As an artist he stands or falls by what he does with this data.*²¹⁶

It follows that when the artist is denied the 'natural' — by which Jones means both the subjective operations of the mind and its relations to a corresponding topography — he is cut off from the multiple significances that make up the 'past': 'We have seen that *a* past is valid for *a* present. But in *our* present we are agreed that a metamorphosis has occurred affecting the liaisons with our past' (p.139).

An aesthetic and cultural solution to Jones's 'situational crisis' is searched by proposing the ideal status of an historical age or of an identifiable tradition. Such claims are substantiated with reference to particular works of art which make up a cultural iconography. In the case of Celticity the distance separating two works of art matters little. What is detailed is an artistic volition or psychological genius peculiar to a particular people. Jones writes of a stone head which he has seen illustrated in a recent analysis of Celtic history:

This stone head is a work illustrative of the continuous characteristic Celtic tendency to transmogrify observed objects (in this case elements of the human face) by the use of stylized motifs which none the less retain a powerful representational significance within a dynamic abstract form. But apart from the aesthetic interest there was another and quite separate thing that riveted my attention: the face itself was strangely familiar. This puzzled me for quite a while and then I recalled a photograph which I had seen a year or two back in an obituary notice of a representative figure in recent Welsh religious and Eisteddfodic circles. His was the face called up by this highly formalized cult-object of the Celtic warrior-hegemony of Middle Europe of twenty-three centuries ago. It seems a far cry indeed. This was a personal impression only, yet one which

was dramatically confirmed later by a friend, who taking one glance at the photograph of the Celtic cult-figure said the two words 'Elfed Lewis'.²¹⁷

Jones records this 'for what it is worth at a time when I see that in various circles the very idea of a common Celticity is regarded as being a figment of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century English romanticism' (p.55). In opposition to such antiquarianism, this anecdote presents two important Romantic ideas of the modern epoch: firstly, the Celtic will to form concerns the representation of the organic within a dynamic abstract schema – beneath the formal considerations of the work there is to be found a powerful naturalistic or anthropomorphic significance, something proceeding from an autobiographical experience of life; secondly, that significance is itself constituted of an essential Celticity such that a recognition of particular archetypes can be made by a subject whose share of a collective (sub) consciousness comprises these sources.

Jones claims that 'it is only the *numina* of localities and differentiated traditions that could have dictated the metamorphoses in any and every art'.²¹⁸ With respect to this Hegelian conviction he criticizes the art critic Bernard Berenson for adopting the view that all art should be defined against a predominantly Hellenistic index of forms. He is criticized for a 'belief that regional or racial cultures are to be chiefly thought of as either "incompetent" or "peripheral" (the author's words) or ideosyncratic [sic] and to be judged in relation to a norm' (p.271). Jones stresses the need to realize that this 'academic norm supposedly deriving from Antiquity through the Italian Renaissance linked with Humanism and hence affecting our whole concept of man, appears no longer to suffice' (pp.271-272). Art should be regarded in terms of the particular and contingent forces affecting its production, which includes both material conditions and an underlying cultural volition – in Jones's case, as with his contemporaries, such a volition was archetypally Northern.

Contemporary art, suffering certain privations and finding itself in a particular position with regard to the civilizational situation, cannot be measured according to the ideals of a humanistic antique art. This is because, 'while our inclinations and predispositions might perhaps attract us to the notion, our reason and our experience make us – perhaps uncomfortably – aware that neither classicism nor humanism are the whole story – not by a very long way' (p.275). Whilst Jones is aware that Modernist form differs greatly and necessarily from the various expressions of humanism, this is development with which he is uneasy. Therefore, instead of an art which in reaction to humanism had forgotten its necessary relations to nature, he sought a restoration of conditions whereby forms which, whilst circumventing the pernicious mimesis and

materialism of the Renaissance, managed to 'retain a powerful representational significance within a dynamic abstract form'. For just as Herbert Read, John Piper, Geoffrey Grigson, a mature Wyndham Lewis and many more had called for a reaction to external developments which threatened the integrity of an indigenous British tradition, so Jones professes his awareness that

as the whole of our culture, lock, stock and barrel, is but a part of West European culture and has, historically and at each turn, taken its cue from continental developments (I speak of main trends and not of detail), it follows that our native genius has had to express itself within those developments. Some have been more patient of native modification than have others, some have given us great opportunities, some have been very unsympathetic to our particular genius, and of course, other matters, religious, political and economic have profoundly affected our freedom or lack of freedom in this respect, our chances of being most ourselves.²¹⁹

The function of the artist is that of 'custodian, rememberer, embodier and voice of the mythus'.²²⁰ What the contemporary artist needs to remember, according to Jones, is his 'native genius' and that, for him, is comprised of an indigenous Celtic mythology – not the fashionable abstractions of Parisian post-Impressionism, nor indeed the home grown abstractions of machine-minded men. Jonathan Miles draws our attention to annotations made by Jones in his copy of Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. Spengler writes that in the present civilizational phase it has 'become necessary to discover, to invent or to squeeze into form, as a rule of being, that which was no longer anchored in instinct'.²²¹ Jones protests that this 'seems to show plainly that men *must* be nostalgic in a "civilization" – only the bastards could feel otherwise. You can't have "morale" if you are living a "mummified" existence – except the will to see the end of it – to hope for its collapse. It seems to be [Spengler's] main contradiction'.²²² Spengler's tortuous, apocalyptic vision saw civilizational man impossibly removed from nature, whose mode of living must learn to embrace the formal abstractions fundamentally inimical to him. David Jones reacts against that conclusion, raising a plangorous argument for a return to an instinctual, intuitive, empathic relationship to form, 'for art, as they say of Grace, follows nature'.²²³ Many of the fragments of poetry included in Jones's last collection of poetry, *The Sleeping Lord*, give their own analogical structure to this debate, and it is in this light that they are now considered.

5.7 Rome vs Locality: Civilization vs Culture

'The Dream of Private Clitus', finished in 1960 but based, as Jones states, on a longer work begun around 1940, is a poem about a Roman soldier who by a 'genius of the dream'²²⁴ is afforded a vision of 'recessions' (p.17) and 'superimpositions' (p.17) yet of 'precision' (p.18) and 'exactitude' (p.18); a dream in which 'heavy bodies sail the air with the greatest of ease' (p.18), and which allows the union of 'things separate enough in wake-a-day' (p.18). His dream is a dream which has multiple significance but which, at the same time, pays attention to its own exactitude. Clitus's process of 'dream making' is an aesthetic process inspired according to the genius of place and culture. And the soldier dreams whilst sleeping in a German forest:

Long

corridors of arches stretched all ways. Smooth, straight boles
those trees had, and no low growth with the sword between each
as it were like a pavement. And it was as if the rounded arches
of our basilicas were suddenly to bestir themselves and the genius
of each column to exert itself and reach across toward the numen
of the column opposite. For all is thrusting and directional in the
labyrinth of those parts and each swaying limb of each tree
struggles for the mastery, high up. (p.16)

The soldier comes under the influence of the genius of place, and that place is Hegel's, Worringer's and Spengler's Romantic, Faustian, North. Here the circumscribed form of his own Classical architecture appears to him vivified and he gains a presentiment of the synthetic structure of the organic-intentional Gothic cathedral:

And looking up at those gusty vaults of the faded green of a
dying year, with chinks of a now darkening blue, flecked from
Westward with the caelian purple – for 'twas near toward the
evening bugle – the mingle of their contesting boughs seemed to make pointed arches.
Now that's a thing you don't see in stone, Oenomaus, a pointed
arch. And I don't suppose you ever will.

But it's a fine thing is a pointed arch made of the striving branches
of the living wood (pp.16-17).

Once dreaming, Clitus is returned to Rome and experiences the animation of the marble relief of 'Tellus Our Mother' on the Ara Pacis Augustae. Having discovered the organic origination of the spiritual, 'directional' Gothic, Jones's protagonist proceeds to demonstrate an empathic reading of Classical architecture. The Celt Lugobelinos next to whom Clitus sleeps, both in and out of the dream, is incorporated along with Clitus into the maternal peace that the relief embodies: 'it seemed that me and Lugo were caught up into that/ peace, whether in a marble body I cannot tell, if as Dioscuri/ of flesh and blood, I can't say – the genius of the dream knows' (p.20). When Lugobelinos cries out the cult name of his own local Earth mother, Clitus understands intuitively – for he comprehends 'no word of Lugo's lingo' (p.20) – that 'his Modron and our Matrona are one' (p.20). Clitus awakes as 'Brasso' invades his dream, because, 'Whether y're a half-section in a/ foreward cubby-hole or half a cohort back in legion-reserve,/ there's always a Brasso to shout the odds, a fact-man to knock/ sideways and fragmentate these dreamed unities and blessed/ conjugations' (p.21).

The vision of a universal mother nature underlying all local difference is contrasted with the expansive Roman empire full of 'fact men' such as Brasso who would level out all such local distinguishing features paying no regard to this fundamental genius of place, for in distinction to the feminine principle informing Jones's poetry, 'Rome worshipped male gods first'.²²⁵ Clitus and Lugobelinos are linked more strongly through their relationship to a natural principle than by their allegiance to Rome and all its intellectual and civilizational implications. When Clitus dies he calls out the same cult-name again just as the soldiers in 'The Book of Balaam's Ass', on the point of death, call 'according to what breasts had fed them – for rite follows matriarchate when y'r brain-pan's stove in'.²²⁶

Jones argues that what is locally and intuitively felt is linked to an absolute which is not known intellectually and conceptually but can be immediately and empathically comprehended in nature. Clitus needs to make no intellectual effort to understand and relate himself to his Celtic counterpart, he needs to use no linguistic concepts for, remembering Maritain again, 'poetic expression does away with their well-off descriptive garrulity, as well as with the necessity of making prevalent their own regime of rational articulation and logical objectivity'.²²⁷ In the imaginative structure of this dream-vision, communication is effected non-conceptually with reference to the

Modron or Tellus Mater who is both nature and art. A Celt is caught up in a Classical relief which signifies divinity in nature and a Roman experiences the spiritual implications of the Northern forest.

Clitus's dream is one of premonitions, one in which an imaginative interior life – a life of intuition – prefigures fact. When he is awoken by Brasso's calling he is dreaming of the Juno feast, 'a great day always in our part of the country' (p.21) which involves the sacrifice of a lamb. The sadness occasioned in the dreamer by this pagan incident suggests what would later become one of the greatest symbols of Christian piety, just as his vision of the forest as stone would indeed develop into the stone arches of Gothic. It is significant that the mathematical and formally inclined 'fact-man' disrupts this process of anticipation, supplanting Clitus's intuitive experience with rational commands directed from a position of external authority. Brasso's mother is not the earth mother known intuitively and mystically by Clitus and Lugobelinos, rather,

They say that she

was ventricled of bronze

had ubera of iron

and that at each vigilia's term

she gave him of her lupine nectar

and by numbers.

And that a tart-mouthed salpinx

brayed unblown of mortal lips

its fierce Etrurian tarantara

at those routine hours

precisely.

And that, they say, is why

in actual, concrete

and present reality

we do, in fact

(at those four routine hours precisely)

relieve the guard. (p.22)

The point made is clear enough: that which represents an intellectualized conception of reality, in this case the officious Brasso, is born of scholastic abstractions – the placeless abstractions of mathematics, mechanics and time. Brasso is the generation of an iron and bronze counting machine – his is not the mother who is also nature, careful of human experience and its local contexts.

'The Tutelar of the Place' is again a poem about the deity of place, about 'She that loves place, time, demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure./ site, differentiated cult, though she is but one mother of us all:/ one earth brings us all forth, one womb receives us all, yet to each/ she is other, named of some name other...' ²²⁸ In this poem Jones once again depicts nature as 'mother of us all', yet significant of local difference: 'Tellus of the myriad names answers to but one name' (p.59), yet 'she's a rare one for locality' (p.59). The teleological ramifications of nature are known intuitively and according to particular subjective circumstances. Nature exists pantheistically and is known with the unthinking innocence of children: 'gently she/ bends her head from far-height when tongue-strings chime the/ name she whispered on known-site, as between sister and brother/ at the time of beginnings...when the wrapped bands are cast and/ the worst mewling is over, after the weaning and before the august/ initiations, in the years of becoming' (p.59). Art responds to nature with the same 'innocent eye', its creators being those intuitively influenced by locality and all that is contingent to it:

Who laud and magnify with made, mutable and beggarly
elements the unmade immutable begettings and precessions of fair-
height, with halting sequences and unresolved rhythms, search-
ingly, with what's to hand, under the inconstant lights that hover
world-flats, that bright by fit and start the tangle of world-wood,
rifting the dark drifts for the wanderers that wind the world-
meander, who seek hidden grammar to give back anathema its first benignity. (pp.60-61)

'Hidden grammar' is sought to redeem a situation which has become anathema, cursed. The interior grammar that is sought has become lost owing to the 'rootless uniformities' (p.62) imposed by 'the men who plan' (p.62). The universality of nature can no longer be intuitively understood through a particular and differentiated symbolic register, because all the variations of cultural difference and morphologies of place are destroyed by the imperial advocates of ever advancing civilization. The poem becomes

a plaint to the spirit of place who should 'confuse their reckonings' (p.62), 'notch their tallies false/ disorder what they have collated' (p.62). For the 'Queen of the differentiated sites, administratrix of the demarca-/tions' (p.62), is the

mother of particular perfections
queen of otherness
mistress of asymmetry
patroness of things counter, parti, pied, several
protectress of things known and handled
help of things familiar and small
wardress of the secret crevices
of things wrapped and hidden
mediatrix of all the deposits
margravine of the troia
empress of the labyrinth. (pp.62-63)

She represents a sensuously known and non-determined nature of the phenomenal world diametrically opposed to the ordering, ratiocinative and intellectual tendencies of the '*mercatores*' (p.62), '*negociatores*' (p.62) and the '*missi*' (p.62), who 'sit in *Consilium*! to liquidate the holy diversities' (p.62). She is called upon to revivify the 'dead limbs of our culture' (p.64) with the life of nature:

In all times of *Gleichschaltung*, in the days of the central economies,
set up the hedges of illusion round some remnant of us, twine the
wattles of mist, white-web a Gwydion-hedge
like fog on the *bryniau*
against the commissioners
and assessors bearing the writs of the Ram to square the world-
floor and number the tribes and write down the secret things and
take away the diversities by which we are, by which we call on
your name, sweet Jill of the demarcations
arc of differences
tower of individuation

queen of the minivers
 laughing in the mantle of variety
 belle of the mound
 for Jac o' the mound
 our belle and donnabelle
 on all the world-mountain. (pp.63-64)

What is evoked in this poem is a sense of particular place and intimate domesticity founded upon an immediate and unreflective relationship with the intentional force of nature. The forms by which man celebrates these relations to the world are vulnerable to the non-sensual, non-naturalistic forms that attempt to displace them. The purely intellectual pursuits of the imperial world-planner who 'squares the world-circle' (p.64) leads to the truncation of all things intimately loved and known, the mechanical writing down with logical objectivity of the things that are known intuitively and, as Jones envisaged of his own poetry, related orally. The tutelar of place is 'patroness of things counter, parti, pied', she represents all those insular characteristics worth preserving, for, as Jones claims, 'not only is our land a most mottled, dappled, pied, partied and brindled land, but so is our character, and so is the physical structure beneath and determining the surface of the land (one of the most interesting, geologically speaking, in the world, I believe), but so also in a curious way is our art, at least one of the characteristics of our art'.²²⁹ She is 'mediatrix of all the deposits' – both the deposits which may be located in the land itself but which are also hidden in the depths of a human nature.

'The Tribune's Visitation', which Jones considered the companion piece to 'The Tutelar of the Place', documents the tortuous attempts of a Roman military official to persuade himself ('I too could weep/ for these Saturnian spells/ and for the remembered things')²³⁰ and his soldiers to forget their peripheral provenance, to spurn their inherited and local myths:

Yes, if memory of them
 (some pruned and bearing tree
 our sister's song)
 calls up some embodiment
 of early loyalty

raises some signum

which, by a subconscious trick

softens the edge of our world intention. (p.52)

Dismissing, amongst other things, 'old rhyme' (p.50) and 'the older fantasies' (p.50), 'small localities' (p.50), 'a remembered hearth' (p.50) and 'the brotherhood of the fields' (p.50), he propagands that 'Suchlike bumpkin sacraments/ are for the young-time/ for the dream watches/ now we serve contemporary fact' (p.50). He continues with the command that 'The remembered things of origin and streamhead, the things of/ the beginnings, of our own small beginnings' (p.51), all must go, for 'Only the neurotic/ look to their beginnings' (p.51). Extending his aqueous analogy, he remarks that all those 'tributary streams we love so well make confluence with/ Tiber and Tiber flows to Ostia and is lost in the indifferent/ sea' (p.53), it being a question 'of ends and not of origins when Tiber flows by Ostia' (p.54). All those myths and traditions significant of particular people and particular places drain into one 'indifferent sea', one placeless ending where 'the maw of the world sucks down all the variant sweets of /Mother Italy and drains to the world-sea the blessed differences' (p.54).

Despite his imperialist apologetics, a bitterly elegiac note begins to pervade the tribune's tone as he argues that of necessity 'the cultural obsequies must already be sung before empire can/ masquerade a kind of life' (p.56). He continues rhetorically:

Are we the ministers of death?

of life-in-death?

do we but supervise the world-death

being dead ourselves

long since?

Do we but organize the extension of death whose organisms

withered with the old economies behind the living fences of the

small localities? (p.56)

Having 'said enough to strip me of my office' (p.57), the tribune reaffirms the necessity of an allegiance to Caesar and the empire, but this allegiance itself through the

use of a particular poetic imagery hints at an alternative mythos which will replace all that has been corroded by the 'rootless uniformities' of empire, offering a new salvation. The allusion to Christianity cannot be missed as the Tribune proclaims: 'See! I break this barrack bread, I drink with you, this issue cup,/ I salute, with you, these mutilated signa, I with you have cried/ with all of us the ratifying formula: *Idem in me*' (p.58). What is ostensibly a vow of allegiance to Caesar becomes at the same time the prefigurement of the Christian Eucharist.

5.8 King Arthur: Mystical Prefigurements of Christ

René Hague claims that a particular passage from *The Roman Quarry*, an incomplete work initiated by Jones around 1938-1940 and contributing much material to the majority of poems in *The Sleeping Lord*, represents 'one of the most important in David's work'.²³¹ Such an importance derives from the fact that we find in it a vision of Christianity which does not subserve the austere and placeless rationality of empire, but whose relation to absolute truth is determined, first and foremost, according to what is known locally and intuitively. Jones offers definitions of a cult not in single-minded sympathy with the intellectual abstractions of the imperial 'world-planners' but as a means by which the threatened genii of particular site and culture might be preserved in one unifying system. Reading through the extract below, the implications of the Tribune's vow of allegiance to Caesar are clarified. The particularities of origin can be maintained and reconciled with the generalities of empire so long as the cult of Christianity, at first tolerated and then appropriated as the state religion by the leaders of the new world-order, does not lose its sacramental basis. A pledge of loyalty to Caesar is acceptable if it includes a devotion to the idea of subjective signification; if it incorporates the idea that the absolute is incarnate in what is actually loved and known.

Should ever the men of rule with the masters of the co-
 venant come to a profitable pact, should universal Caesar
 kiss the indivisible baal, then farewell hearth, and farewell
 home for all the gods of place and the sweet name-numina.
 Unless some Lars named of all the names and master of
 them in the very flesh on known-hill drags their convenient
 abstractions down and with hooks pinions the sky-plan to

place and time.

Then in such a one on one hill the hill-war gathers to
itself all struggle ever, denominates the site by which all
sites are named. Now is restored to each help-height to
each dear site the ancient efficacies.

Not on far fair-height, unbodied, where men of mind
clamber the steep concepts, grope the damps of unknowing,
but now on named tump, known to the kith where this
kin made this mound without this tun, beyond this vallum
– now is he lord of each locality, who lets blood of this
body moist here this cranny of rock on this parched
alien hill far side Our Sea. Not on any hill nor not on unseen
unknown other-height the masters of concept postulate,
but here in this demarcated place to touch and cross with
iron, to see with this flesh-eye. Back to the womb of
Tellus drips the fertile flood. (p.43)

If the secular emperor were to deploy the universal concepts and ‘convenient abstractions’ of the Christian religion in order to further his own imperial or civilizational plans, then all sense of locality and individuality would collapse into indifference. But if such abstractions – such a ‘sky-plan’ – were anchored to place, the particular could still provide a means to the universal end. If Christianity were to proceed from the particular mythologies of a particular people, careful of place and time, mediated by some known cult-man or Lars ‘named of all the names and master of them in the very flesh’, then might the intuitively known embrace the absolute. If the Christianity sanctioned by the Roman Empire was of such a type, then might a bridge be constructed between the ‘men who rule’ and the dwellers of actually loved and known locality – between the ‘unseen unknown other-height’ of a transcendent religion and the divine principle in nature. In this connection René Hague claims that ‘the Rome that the poet loves, the “Roma caput orbis, splendor, spes, aurea Roma”, is not imperial Rome, nor even the early Republic, but Christian Rome which held on through the Dark Ages’ (p.219). The Rome envisaged by the poet was not a Rome seeking to square all variety and to bring all difference under absolute rule, but conversely, the Rome which, by means of the new faith it allowed to develop in Britain, preserved and held together a variegated culture during colonization; the Rome

which, having departed British shores, left a religious infrastructure from within whose parameters a defence could be made against the Dark Age threats of self-immolation and Anglo-Saxon incursion.

It is in this context that King Arthur represents 'the central figure of our island myth',²³² or as Philip Pacey claims, 'the Romano-British leader who for David Jones represents the vital synthesis, of British Pagan, Roman-Christian; who fought-off further pagan invasions for long enough for Christianity to grow strong and conquer the conquerors'.²³³ Arthur is given dual validity: as a defender of Christian principles – a Romano-British saviour holding together an abandoned civilization – he gains association with the one absolute moment in time represented by what Hague terms the 'factual historicity of the redemption and the offering of the liberating sacrifice in one place, by one victim, at one particular point of time';²³⁴ but as a folk-hero he dominates an embracing British mythos endlessly receding into the depths of the pre-Christian imagination: his existence in a post-Roman Britain, where the once civilized, urbanized tribes start retreating to their local pre-Roman habitations, stretches back to and recalls an earlier time. Thus Arthur appeals on an intellectual level, that is, his existence can be reconciled with particular facts existing in an historical continuum whose beginning and end is measured according to a rational, Romano-Christian scheme; but he exists also as the embodiment of a culturally defined, intuitively known, collective unconscious – not as an historical figure limited by the claims made upon him by specific events, but as myth:

the piecing together of the historical data, while, in the nature of things, leaving untouched the mythological significances and the Romance figure, *has* affected the probabilities as to the historicity of a mortal man behind that figure. The 'incarnational element' is now shown to be in conformity with an historic setting. 'Arthur' has become as historically feasible as MacArthur, and as congruent with a given situation. The type (and in every probability the name) belongs to history, but the name belongs not only to the shallows of mere events but to mythological deeps as well.²³⁵

Arthur represents a figure within whom the conflicting claims of myth and history attain some sort of reconciliation. In his dual capacity of pagan-mythic hero and Romano-Christian ruler he presides over the respective Spenglerian concerns of both intuitively known culture and intellectually determined civilization. He signifies the Lars 'named of all names' through whom the disembodied, conceptual abstractions of the Christian cult can be pinioned to all that is locally and subjectively, sensually and imaginatively

known. But given that 'the "historic sense" belongs to "late civilizations"',²³⁶ where knowledge is rationally determined rather than intuitively felt, where events are abstracted from a matrix of connection and conceived atomistically according to the operations of the intellect, it is vital for the poet to preserve the mythical sense of Arthur above all else, for 'if we are altogether impatient of what is seen darkly in a mirror we shall have little use for the myth of Arthur. We must not have too great a passion for continuous definition'.²³⁷

The Arthurian material appealed to Jones in its capacity to evoke all the mythological heritage of Britain, and was employed to do so at a time when the poet considered the gathering in and preservation of such deposits to be of urgent necessity – during a time threatened by the aforesaid historical sense, by fact, formulae and 'a passion for continuous definition'; during, in short, a late civilizational epoch whose mythological sense Jones considered to be increasingly fractured: 'We do not know what songs may yet be possible or what shape our myth will take, but it looks as though the waste land before us is extensive; and it is certain that in our anabasis across it we shall have reason to keep in mind the tradition of our origins in both matter and spirit' (p.242).

In order to further illustrate this dilemma, and the related necessity of consolidating our spiritual and material origins, Jones found it possible to construct an analogy between his mid-century island and the shadowy Britain evacuated by the Romans. The waste land of the Dark Ages threw up a leader conflating indigenous legend with the newly introduced rationale of Christianity. The age of Arthur was one in which the increasingly hieratic sacramentalism of the recently departed Roman party was reclaimed by the compound and recessive signification of a culturally owned mythology. King Arthur brought together the best of two opposing worlds. He gave to Britain an indigenous leader, a Celt in touch with the ancient codes of practice threatened by the civilizational concerns of the Romans; but, as well as this, he managed to reconcile these codes to the universal implications of the Christian faith whose establishment had depended upon the now decaying foundations of an otherwise largely detrimental epoch. Thus, states Jones, faced between a choice of an imperially sanctioned Christian religion and Celtic enthusiasms, the modern Briton would, in the latter, 'recognize affinities, springing not from congruity of belief and practice, but from congruity of soil and blood and climate' (p.255).

Arthur demanded invocation in the 'complex of enthusiasms that blazed up from the ashes of the lost west' (p.255), 'where signs of Roman anchorage show at low tide, and the disintegrating Roman iron corrodes and streaks tawny the crumbling Roman

cement' (p.256). His rule could lead to an ideal situation whereby the collapse of the far reaches of Caesar's empire into the Dark Ages might be succeeded by a period of rule consolidating the rational codes of Christianity with a longer-enduring Celtic mysticism: 'for the watermen of God must bring their rule to the evacuated, and to where the ancient hill-forts are being feverishly re-conditioned for internecine war – for the long toil and dark winter of the West, that was, in fact, a bright birth-time' (p.256). The Christian religion, which had begun to flourish in the latter stages of the Romano-British civilization, and whose disciples had been forced to the Celtic peripheries during the Dark Ages, could return in a new, re-mythologized guise. The civilizational centre having fallen apart, everything which had once been marginalized could reassert itself in the vacuum.

If this was the case with the post-Roman, post-civilizational, post-historical, post-intellectual Dark Ages, so David Jones, exercising his analogical mind, envisages his Britain seeking the sanctified resuscitation of her most sacred mythologies in a mystical Christianity dissociated from the eschatological dogmatism recommended by recent contemporary figures of the waste land; figures, indeed, not beyond aligning themselves with the anti-humanist dictates – the concrete and iron abstractions – of decayed Classical civilization:²³⁸

In some moods those repeated words of Turpin in the *Song of Roland*, 'Sirs, you are set for sorrow', would seem to be our text, and often times, as Lancelot says, what we do for the best, turns out for the worst, but we have heard with our ears and our fathers have told us the marvels done in their time and in pre-history, so that, one way or another, *Deus ex machina* may have for us another than its usual connotation. From the machine-age the strayed machine-men may create a myth patient of baptism. Arthur may return from 'faerie' in the least expected of guises. (p.259)

When David Jones uses the narrative material of Arthurian myth to explore the dialectical implications of civilization to culture, history to myth and Christianity to pre-Christian creeds, he simultaneously lends allegorical form to the structural principles underlying his philosophy of art. It is in this dual light that the poetic construct of Arthur must be considered. As a figure bridging the polarities of an internalized, intuitive sense – penetrating, as Maritain puts it the 'collective unconscious of the Western world' – and the conceptual order of a religiously sanctioned intellect, he brings to Jones's form the claims of both subjective and objective realms. In two painted inscriptions (Fig. 14) whose text is taken from Malory's *Morte Darthur* (Book XII, Chapter 7), the poet can claim: 'Here lies Arthur the once and future King'. The

inscriptions, whose style merges the rational lucidity of Roman lettering with the runic characteristics of an earlier script, signify an Arthur buried in the depths of folk mythology, but also a Christian saviour historically defined and chronicled by the promise of a second coming and final judgement: 'The mythological deposits seem to say to us: God is wonderful in his masters of illusion, in the transmogrifications, in the heroes who sustain the folk and the land' (p.258).

Thus it is that in the poem 'The Hunt', Arthur, 'stricken numen of the woods',²³⁹ indistinguishable from the particular and pied land that is his – 'if his forehead is radiant/ like the smooth hill in the lateral light/ it is corrugated/ like the defences of the hill/ because of his care for the land/ and for the men of the land (p.67)' – signifies an intention stretching from the interiority of nature towards universality:

Like the breast of the cock-thrush that is torn in the hedge-
war when bright on the native mottle the deeper mottling is and
brighting the diversity of textures and crystal-bright on the
delicate fret the clear dew-drops gleam: so was his dappling and
his dreadful variety

the speckled lord of Prydain
in his twice-embroidered coat

the bleeding man in the green
and if through the trellis of green

and between the rents of the needlework
the whiteness of his body shone

so did his dark wounds glisten.

And if his eyes, from their scrutiny of the hog-track and from
considering the hog, turned to consider the men of the host (so
that the eyes of the men of the host met his eyes) it would be
difficult to speak of so extreme a metamorphosis (p.68).

The 'speckled lord' embodies the pied morphology of the British countryside, enfolded in minutely detailed imagery and associated with the pantheistic figure of the green man; yet from within this local, naturalistic and mythological context a transmogrification occurs in which the protagonist evokes an architectonic image significant of truths

beyond the immediate compass of an empathically experienced nature. A 'trellis of green' reveals a stone-white corpse graced with the telling wounds of sacrifice. Arthur's metamorphosis discloses the immanence of God in a setting which is peculiarly British. He introduces the Romantic, Hegelian archetype of God in man and man in God into a closely observed site whose characteristically British features appeal to the far-receding mythological resources of everyman:

The clues are many and varied and cover large fields of enquiry. There remains much, for those who are competent, to do; and all things connected with this tangle should be of interest to people of this island, because it is an affair of our own soil and blood and tradition, our own 'inscape', as Hopkins might say – it is the *matière de Bretagne*. We have said enough to indicate the intricate nature of this thing, and the necessity of preserving the many elements. 'All must be safely gathered in', as Mr. Stanley Spencer said to me, with reference to the making of a picture (a more apt expression of the artist's business I never heard). '*Instaurare omnia in Christo*' might be said to be on the labarum Arthur carries as indicative of *one* of the *many* emphases in this changing role from agriculture deity to medieval King.²⁴⁰

The Christian significance of Arthur attains to universality, but it is preceded by and accessed through many other sources constituting an 'inscape', an interior tangle rooted in 'our own soil and blood and tradition', or, 'to pursue the simile of the root and the branch; what the romance writers did can be expressed as cultivating and developing the above-ground growth, the flowering rod – as for the roots, they are another matter (although today they intrigue us most), they were enduring long before'.²⁴¹ Our interior mythology is ennobled and cultivated by Christian codes, is rationalized for our better understanding and saved from the depths of mystical incomprehensibility. This does not mean, however, that it is resolved into theological abstractions: it remains always our own. The universal principle is realized through the intentional nature of an indigenous mythology, is generated as a principle of our own pure inner subjectivity. This is an idea which Jones extends to the act of artistic creation itself:

It has tentatively been suggested that the early Celtic nature poetry is not unconnected with the solitaries who left their colleges and enclosures to seek more isolated encounter. 'In hill and plain, in the islands of the sea, there is no escape from Christ' is a fragment attributed to one such. Whatever the hair-splitting, the severities, the taboos, the background is the flora and fauna of Thule, where the contours are lost and found, where intuition refracts the shape of definition, where men speak true only when they speak as poets. (p.254-255)

Whatever the orthodox intentions of the early Christian Celts, the intuition – poetic mode of the North – holds sway over the intellect and the poetic world springs from a refractory consciousness whose structure discovers an equivalence in the diaphanous geography of the land:

The folk tradition of the insular Celts seems to present to the mind a half-aquatic world – it is one of its most fascinating characteristics – it introduces a feeling of transparency and inter-penetration of one element with another, of transposition and metamorphosis. The hedges of mist vanish or come again under the application of magic, such as Geraint ab Erbin encountered, just as the actual mists over peat-bog and tarn and *traeth* disclose or lose before our eyes drifting stumps and tussocks. It is unstable, the isles float, where was a *caer* or a *llys* now is a glassy expanse. (pp.238-239)

The poetry of the Celts responds to the world empathically and sensually before there can be any chance of submitting the immediate prehension of experience to a concept-forming intellect. For, as Jones makes clear with reference to the sacred ash, the world-tree of Scandinavian lore, 'the imagination must work through what is known and known by a kind of touch. Like the Yggdrasil of northern myth, the roots must be in hard material though the leaves be conceptual and in the clouds; otherwise we can have fancy, but hardly imagination' (p.244). This might explain why, for instance, in the early 'Celtic monastic, eremitic and peregrinatory enthusiasm...there seems also to have been a consciousness of the beauty of the created world not always found in ascetics' (p.254).

Jonathan Miles found David Jones's aesthetic theories to be anomalous in so far as they insisted upon the dual importance to any artistic consideration of both intellectual and intuitivist principles. Elizabeth Ward is similarly dubious about his later work, claiming of the eponymous poem 'The Sleeping Lord' that it

resumes the conflict between abstract preconceptions and the solid resistance to abstraction of its local imagery, which is a feature of the collection as a whole. It is true that this imagery also subserves the sense of dichotomy which is the basis of the myth: the fragment in fact derives its distinctive ethos – as it takes its form, which is dialectical – less from abstractly enunciated principles than from a subtler movement back and forth between images of light, synonymous with life, on the one hand, and more ominous images of night, storm or death on the other, an antinomy discernible in the features of Wales itself, with its variety of landscape and the sharp alternation of its seasons.²⁴²

Through a reticence to lend a proper interpretive structure to this 'conflict' between the abstract and the local, or the 'sense of dichotomy which is the basis of the myth', Ward's criticism accepts a definition of the poem's 'dialectic' form based upon the identification of a superficially correct, although perhaps theoretically unchallenging, 'antinomy' to be found in the contrast between images of good and bad, light and dark. Ward claims that 'this dialectical imagery ultimately serves to underline the schematic oppositions envisaged by myth' (p.197). It has been my contention, however, that Jones did not envisage myth as part of an antithetical construction forever separating the abstract and the local; on the contrary myth, in both its cognitive and narrative functions, serves as a means by which abstractions are made accessible to human understanding.

Arthur, 'the sleeping lord', represents both the prime mover of an indigenous myth and the son of a divine principle whose incarnation in the here and now suffers the constant threat of an unsympathetic 'civilizational situation'. As Jones says of his capacity as artist:

We can, in my opinion, assert little with confidence, but I think we can assert that the poet is a 'rememberer' and that it is part of his business to keep open the lines of communication. One obvious way of doing this is by handing on such fragmented bits of our own inheritance as we have ourselves received. This is the way I myself attempt. There are, no doubt, other ways. The artist is not responsible *for* the future but he is, in a certain sense, responsible *to* the future.²⁴³

The poet, then, rather than frustrating the local imagery of the poem with abstract preconceptions as Ward suggests, sets about trying to keep the lines of communication between the universal and the particular open. The poet questions the whereabouts of the *matière de Bretagne* and Christian archetype personified; he attempts to search out an unadulterated place in which to intuitively gauge his presence, a place singing with significance which has not suffered a break from its resonant deposits:

Is the tump by Honddu

his lifted bolster?

does a gritstone outcrop

incommode him?

does a deep syncline

sag beneath him?

or does his dinted thorax rest
 where the contorted heights
 themselves rest
on a lateral pressured anticline?²⁴⁴

The abstractions of the piece are not the deliberately cultivated devices of poetic closure, but despised illustrations – unavoidable symptoms – of an abnormal and pathological civilizational situation which renders ‘the season sequence out of joint’ (p.75) and disallows a proper fusion of spiritual and natural principles; a situation which leads the poet to proclaim with Spenglerian gravity that

 by whatever freak of nature
or by the widdershin spell
 of a wand-waver
this night-wind of the temperate Ides of Quintilis
blows half a gale & boreal at that.
 Indeed, so chill it is
it strikes to the bone, more like the wind
 of the lengthening light
 of the strengthening cold (p.75)

For it is this landscape that has been turned into a waste land of abstract form by the destructive force of the boar with which Arthur fought and ‘which encounter availed him nothing’ (p.92); a territory which, with its sylvan desiccation, recalls the war-time nightmare, indelibly experienced by David Jones and Paul Nash (Fig. 15), of a sacral nature violated:

It is the Boar Trwyth
 that has pierced through
the stout-fibred living wood
 that bears the sacral bough of gold
It is the hog that has ravaged the fair *onnen* and the hornbeam
and the Queen of the Woods. It is the hog that has tusk-riven the

tendoned roots of the trees of the *llwyn* whereby are the tallest with the least levelled low and lie up-so-down. (pp.89-90)

And yet it is this territory in which there may still be supposed a continuum of significance, in which Arthur becomes the geography of a land sensually known, the central protagonist riding through a mythological inscape intuitively known and the prefigurement of a redemptive Christ who is historically, intellectually and universally known:

Is the Usk a drain for his gleaming tears
who weeps for the land
 who dreams his bitter dream
for the folk of the land
does Tawe clog for his sorrows
do the parallel dark-seam drainers
 mingle his anguish-stream
with the scored valleys' tilted refuse. (p.91)

Fragments from the waste land are carried away by a surviving stream of significance which flows from primal mythological sources and which takes on symbols of universal salvation. Arthur's foot man lies close to his sleeping lord, his purpose stretching from mythical into Christian significance:

does he do what is his to do with some
measure of the dedication of the daughter of Pebin of the Water-
Meadow, who held in her lap the two feet of the shape-shifting
Rhi of Arfon?
Or, silently, attentively & carefully
and with latreutic veneration
as did Mair Modlen
the eternally pierced feet
of the Shepherd of Greekland

the Heofon-Cyning

born of Y Forwyn Fair (pp.72-73)

Again, Arthur's Candle-bearer lies buried deep in the strata of an indigenous mythological significance – in a peculiarly Celtic inscape as surely as in a geographically defined landscape – yet the forest land he inhabits anticipates a more formal Christian structure, he bears his candle in the organic provenance of the Gothic building. Seeking shelter from the boreal wind, his scholastic light, for 'light/ (so these clerigwyr argue)/ is, in itself, a good' (p.77),

bends one way
with the wind-bowed elder boughs
and the pliant bending of the wild elm
(that serves well the bowyers)
and the resistant limbs
of the tough, gnarled *derwen* even
lean all to the swaying briary-tangle
that shelters low
in the deeps of the valley-wood
the fragile *blodyn-y-gwynt* (p.74)

The Christian significances of Arthur encompass all the significances of an anterior mythology. Arthur represents a nature implicit to the people of Britain, but a nature which is also intentional, which stretches out from the local to embrace all things – he represents a super-sensible substrate of the people of Britain, buried in the folds of their land and their myth, but promising universal salvation. Therefore his priest makes remembrance

For these and for all the departed of the Island and indeed not
only for those of the Island of the Mighty, nor only for those of the
Patriarchate of the West, nor yet only for the departed of these
provinces together with those of the provinces that are within the

jurisdiction of the Patriarch whose seat is at Caergystennin
where Urbs is Polis
far side the narrowing *culfor*
that links Middle Sea
with Pontus Euxinus
where the Ymherawdr
wearing his colobium sindonis
sits in the Sacred Palace
but for the departed
of the entire universal orbis
from the unknown beginnings
unguessed milleniums back
until now:
FOR THESE ALL
he makes his silent, secret
devout and swift memento. (p.86)

As Arthur lies sleeping – ‘And is his bed wide/ is his bed deep on the folded strata?’ (p.70) – he sends messages through nature which are uneasily received by those unfamiliar with the locality: ‘when he shifts a little in his fitfull/slumber does a covering stone dislodge/and roll to Reynoldstone?’ (p.94). This sign of presence is noted by Anglo-French soldiers stationed in Wales who, although at first supposing it to be nothing other than the wind, reckon it ‘best to warn the serjeant below’ (p.95). The soldiers, finding themselves in a strange land, are unable to understand the dynamism of the environment, cannot comprehend the significant radiance of the nature around them, which is also the radiance of a collective cultural memory from which they are perhaps excluded:

wind-stir may be, most like to be
as we between us do agree
or - stir of gramarye
or whatsomever of ferly - who should say?
or solid substantiality?
you never know *what* may be

- not hereabouts.

No wiseman's son *born* do know

not in these whoreson March-lands

of this Welshry. (pp.95-96)

The soldiers, perhaps like the bemused critic, are unable to decide whether the movement of the land is attributable to 'solid substantiality' or to the pure spirit of 'ferly', to what is local or what is abstract. Despite their proclamation that this is beyond anyone's power of comprehension, the reader who is engaged with the aesthetic and mythic principles of the poem understands precisely the rhetorical questions that it proceeds to venture: the sensible and the super-sensible exist as one. Nature and spirit become indistinguishable aspects of one another formed in a poetry which incorporating both seems to become both: a typographical format in which text re-presents the spirit of Arthur articulating the ambiguous border-land he lies beneath:

are the hills his couch

or is he the couchant hills?

Are the slumbering valleys

him in slumber

are the still undulations

the still limbs of him sleeping?

is the configuration of the land

the furrowed body of the lord

are the scarred ridges

his dented greaves

do the trickling gullies

yet drain his hog-wounds?

Does the land wait the sleeping lord

or is the wasted land

that very lord who sleeps? (p.96)

5.9 Conclusions

Writing retrospectively in 1965, David Jones claimed that 'in the 1930s there was, I think, a feeling that liaison with the whole past of man-the-artist was still possible however "contemporary" the images employed'.²⁴⁵ That is, the poet believed that, despite the technological abstractions of civilization and the accompanying privations of its formalistic modes of expression, a melioristic and synthetic view of man's epistemological and aesthetic relations with the world was still possible. This is a perspective endorsed by Nicolette Gray in 1949:

Growth, newness, stability, movement; it is in quest of just these qualities – which in their coming and going make up the essence of our knowledge of life – that so many modern artists have abandoned representational art. They feel that the things in which we know these qualities embodied, like Mount Ararat and the Ark and the Dove, or even any mountain, ship, or bird, are cluttered up with the mental debris of an unreal and decayed civilization. The debris cannot be shifted and so they seek to isolate the essence of the quality in abstract forms and colours.

For David Jones the process has been the opposite. To him the traditional civilization of the West is valid. The ideas we have inherited are true, and the material forms by which men have sought to incarnate them, weave them into their mode of living in time and in the flesh, in clothes, in speech and any sort of ritual, are valid. In fact these are the normal symbols of our culture – at the same time he, just as much as the other artists, is aware of the acute decay of that culture of which the disintegration of the symbol is of course a symptom. The reintegration achieved in his work has therefore been immensely difficult.²⁴⁶

David Jones's sign making, according to Gray, does not seek certainty in the absolute realms of pure form. The artist does not turn in reaction from natural or humanistic principles to embrace a new religious idealism, but sets himself the task, in his own words, of ennobling 'our new media as we have already ennobled and made significant our old'.²⁴⁷ The artist does not seek to worship the unfamiliar and the abstract as external forms, but to 'reintegrate' them, to bring them within the compass of an intuitive or empathic understanding. To this end we must dismiss Elizabeth Ward's claim that Jones's response to the break between technology and the arts, and the concordant fissure between utilitarian and extra-utile ways of thinking, 'is ultimately to reject contemporary Western values in favour of his own vision of an organic, pre-industrial, religious society on primitive and medieval lines'.²⁴⁸

The conception of Jones as an ascetically minded religious apologist retreating to a singular aesthetic and social position is a false one. It was against precisely these strictures, which, as Gray notes, had so characterized the thought and art of his predecessors, that he sought release. Thus, for example, his appreciation of Jacques Maritain did not owe so much to the latter's nominal Thomism as to his neo-Kantian theories of dual signification. Similarly, his interest in the relationship between Gothic and an indigenous Northern will to form (or Christianity and Celticity), has more to do with the paradigmatic dialectics of Hegel – disseminated through Worringer, Spengler and a new generation of British Romantic artists – than any association with a straightforward, dogmatically inclined craving for a new social order based on medieval models.

Acutely aware of the dialectical basis of Modernism and the need to discriminate between its various interpretations, David Jones's creative effort cannot be regarded in critical parenthesis. Constantly seeking the elusive synthesis of both objective and subjective, intellectual and intuitive worlds, his aesthetic eschewed, to paraphrase John Piper, the preceding Modernist monuments of a clever but only half-directioned age. He concludes this study as a figure given the clarity of context; as an important member of a philosophically sophisticated generation whose intent was to redirect the age, to search backward only in order free it from the reactionary ideologies arresting its proper and fundamentally Romantic movement forward.

NOTES

Notes For Introduction

¹Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island: the Modern English Writers* (New York, 1988), p.6.

²See Kenner, p.5.

³T.E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, edited by Herbert Read (London, 1936; first published 1924), p.107.

⁴Wilhelm Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, translated and edited by Herbert Read (London, 1927), p.181. First published as *Formprobleme der Gothik* (Munich, 1912). Worringer's 'classicism' refers to an anthropomorphic and naturalistic, empathic form of expression, whereas Hulme's definition – confusingly – signifies quite the opposite, standing for abstraction. However, the essential point remains the same: the Gothic will to form is a synthetic volition which fuses both objective and subjective considerations; therefore, any insistence upon the primacy of one or other pole alone lies without the force of the Northern, Romantic tradition. As will be seen, Worringer's thesis precludes Hulme's singular conception of 'classicism' (abstraction) as surely as it stands against a one-sided reading of aesthetics according to the opposite application of the term.

Notes For Chapter One

⁵Hulme, p.5.

⁶See Ezra Pound, *Gaudier-Brzeska: a Memoir by Ezra Pound* (London, 1916), p.137.

⁷Edward Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York, 1909), p.21.

⁸Vernon Lee and C. Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness: and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (London, 1912), pp.17-18. See also Hermann Lotze, *Microcosmus: an Essay Concerning Man and His Relation to the World*, translated by Elizabeth Hamilton and E.E. Constance Jones, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1885), I, 585-586.

⁹Vernon Lee, *Vital Lies: Studies of Some Varieties of Recent Obscurantism*, 2 vols (London, 1912), II, 169.

¹⁰Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p.59.

¹¹Lee, *Vital Lies*, II, 169-170.

¹²Vernon Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy: and Other Contemporary Studies* (London, 1908), p. 209.

¹³Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.11-12.

¹⁴See Charles Altieri, *Painterly Abstraction in Modernist American Poetry: the Contemporaneity of Modernism* (Cambridge, 1989). Altieri claims, along Kantian lines, that:

the role of the artist is to make the purposive activity show that there can be an other to representation, because art so 'puts the mental powers purposefully into swing' that we feel a connection to the world, and to our own nature, that cannot be explained by the categories available to the understanding. The inner lawfulness of the work simply establishes a direct spiritual life as a site inviting a reflective judgement that all participants can share. (pp.104-105)

¹⁵Lee, *Vital Lies*, I, vii-viii.

¹⁶Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy*, p.195.

¹⁷Lee, *Vital Lies*, I, 25.

¹⁸Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, pp.353-354.

¹⁹Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: an Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge, 1913), p.66.

²⁰Wilhelm Worringer quotes Lipps in his own work *Abstraction and Empathy: a Contribution to the Psychology of Style*, translated by Michael Bullock (London, 1953), p.24. First published as *Abstraktion und Einfühlung: ein Beitrag zur Stilpsychologie* (Munich, 1908).

²¹Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p.73.

²²Lee, *Vital Lies*, I, 200-201.

²³Lee, *Vital Lies*, II, 194.

²⁴Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by A. Mitchell (London, 1911), p.186.

²⁵Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism: Essays: 1972-1980* (Minneapolis, 1982), pp.213-214.

²⁶Hulme, p.62.

²⁷Lee, *Vital Lies*, I, 27.

²⁸Hulme, p.63.

Notes For Chapter Two

²⁹Paul Frankl, *The Gothic: Literary Sources and Interpretations through Eight Centuries* (Princeton, 1960), p.679.

³⁰Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.15.

³¹Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p.362, n.

³²Rudolph Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art* (London, 1986), p.59.

³³Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.9.

³⁴Frankl says of Alois Riegl, who influenced Worringer greatly with his theories concerning the Gothic artistic volition, that he:

restored to the artist full responsibility for his work, declaring his mental activity to be the true source of art. In this original sense the concept of artistic volition is absolutely unproblematical and a most banal matter of course – for us today; but for the generation immediately following Semper it was not a matter of course, and Riegl's Copernican revolution was accordingly an achievement of grave consequence. (p.629)

³⁵Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, pp.1-2.

³⁶Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.18.

³⁷Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.14.

³⁸G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art* by G.W.F. Hegel, translated by T.M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford, 1975), I, 356.

³⁹Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.35.

⁴⁰Adolf Hildebrand, *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*, translated and revised with the author's co-operation by Max Meyer and Robert Morris Ogden (New York, 1907), p.17.

⁴¹Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.22.

⁴²Hildebrand, p.107.

⁴³Lee, *The Beautiful*, p.118.

⁴⁴Hildebrand, p.123.

⁴⁵Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.40.

⁴⁶Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.104.

⁴⁷Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.114.

⁴⁸Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, authorized translation with notes by Charles Atkinson, 2 vols (London, 1926-1929), I, 186-187.

⁴⁹Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.175.

⁵⁰Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism: Wimmer Lecture 1948* (Latrobe, 1951), pp.16-17.

⁵¹Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.104.

⁵²Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, pp.65-66.

⁵³Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, pp.107-108.

⁵⁴Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.154.

⁵⁵Included in *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.xiv.

⁵⁶Hulme, p.109.

⁵⁷Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, p.13.

⁵⁸Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London, 1957), p.126.

⁵⁹Alun Jones, *The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme* (London, 1960), p.64.

⁶⁰Hulme, p.221.

⁶¹Michael Roberts, *T.E. Hulme* (London, 1938), p.143.

⁶²See Ezra Pound, 'This Hulme Business', *Townsmen*, 2, no. 5 (January 1939), p.15. The article is also anthologized in Hugh Kenner's *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (London, 1951), 307-309, although Kenner cites the date of publication incorrectly as January 1938.

⁶³JF. Hendry, 'Hulme as Horatio', *Life and Letters To-day*, 35, no. 64 (December 1942), 136-147 (p.136).

⁶⁴Henry Treece, *How I See Apocalypse* (London, 1946), p.173.

⁶⁵Hulme had said:

In spite of its apparent variety, European art in reality forms a coherent body of work resting on certain presuppositions, of which we become conscious for the first time when we see them denied by other periods of art (cf. the work of Riegl on Byzantine art). One might say that in the same way, an understanding of the religious philosophy which subordinates man (regarded as a part of nature) to certain absolute values – in other words, a realisation of the sense of this dogma – forces us to see that there is a much greater family resemblance between all philosophy since the Renaissance than is ever recognised. (pp.256-257)

⁶⁶Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.7.

⁶⁷In Benedetto Croce, *My Philosophy: and Other Essays on the Moral and Political Problems of Our Time*, selected by R. Klibansky, translated by E.F. Carr (London, 1949), p.140.

⁶⁸Hulme, p.131. Hulme, in his turn, had claimed that 'there are people who, disgusted with romanticism, wish for us to go back to the classical period, or who, like Nietzsche, wish us to admire the Renaissance. But such partial reactions will always fail, for they are only half-measures – it is no good returning to humanism, for that will itself degenerate into romanticism' (p.62).

⁶⁹Croce, *My Philosophy*, pp.143-144.

⁷⁰Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.176.

⁷¹See introduction to Benedetto Croce, *What is Living and What is Dead of the Philosophy of Hegel*, translated by Douglas Ainslie (London, 1915), pp.xii-xiii.

⁷²Croce, *My Philosophy*, p.145.

- ⁷³Benedetto Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics*, translated by Patrick Romanell (New York, 1965), p.25.
- ⁷⁴ Croce, *My Philosophy*, p.134.
- ⁷⁵Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics*, p.49.
- ⁷⁶J.F.Hendry, *The New Apocalypse: an Anthology of Criticism, Poems and Stories* (London, 1941), p.9.
- ⁷⁷*The White Horseman: Prose and Verse of The New Apocalypse*, edited by J.F. Hendry and Henry Treece (London, 1941), p.157.
- ⁷⁸Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.174.
- ⁷⁹Hendry, *The White Horseman*, p.167.
- ⁸⁰Hendry, *The New Apocalypse*, p.15.
- ⁸¹Henry Treece, *How I See Apocalypse*, p.74.
- ⁸²Hendry, *The New Apocalypse*, p.13.
- ⁸³Treece, p.173.
- ⁸⁴See G.S. Fraser's introduction to *The White Horseman*, p.15.

Notes For Chapter Three

- ⁸⁵The importance of Worringer's ideas to Modernist historiography – apart from and beyond Hulme's speculative and propagandist abstractions of them – is gradually increasing. David Mellor acknowledges his influence upon the neo-Romantic movement in Britain in his catalogue for the Barbican exhibition *A Paradise Lost: the Neo-Romantic Imagination in Britain 1935-55* (London, 1987). He is similarly, albeit briefly, referenced in Malcolm Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times* (London, 1988). Individual artists and writers are also, it seems, becoming subject to reinterpretation according to his dialectical principles. Thus, for example, his epistemological and epochal model is cited in connection with the later poetry of T.S. Eliot in Steve Ellis, *The English Eliot: Design, Language and Landscape in Four Quartets* (London, 1991). Again, Eliot's poetry is analysed with regard to Worringer's aesthetic in Jewel Spears Brooker and Joseph Bentley, *Reading The Waste Land: Modernism and the Limits of Interpretation* (Amherst, 1990).
- ⁸⁶Herbert Read, *Art Now: an Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture* (London, 1933), pp.52-53.
- ⁸⁷Herbert Read, 'The Modern Epoch in Art' in *The Philosophy of Modern Art: Collected Essays by Herbert Read* (London, 1952), p.21.

- ⁸⁸*History of Modern Painting from Baudelaire to Bonnard: the Birth of a New Vision*, text by Maurice Raynal, introduction by Herbert Read, historical and biographical notes by Jean Leymarie, translated by Stuart Gilbert (London, 1949), p.xxi.
- ⁸⁹Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p.364.
- ⁹⁰Read, 'The Modern Epoch in Art', p.20.
- ⁹¹Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.40.
- ⁹²Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art: an Expanded and Annotated Version of the Reith Lectures Broadcast in October and November 1955* (Harmondsworth, 1964; first published 1956), pp.145-146.
- ⁹³See Henry Moore's contribution to *Unit 1: the Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture*, edited by Herbert Read (London, 1934), p.30.
- ⁹⁴Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, pp.193-194.
- ⁹⁵Herbert Read, *The Meaning of Art* (London, 1936; first published 1931), p.114.
- ⁹⁶Hugh MacDiarmid, *Aesthetics in Scotland*, edited and introduced by Alan Bold (Edinburgh, 1984), pp.34-35.
- ⁹⁷Read, *The Meaning of Art*, p.162
- ⁹⁸Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.118.
- ⁹⁹See Paul Nash's contribution to *Unit 1*, p.80.
- ¹⁰⁰Robert Rosenblum, *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko* (London, 1976), pp.45-46.
- ¹⁰¹Herbert Read, 'English Art', *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 63, no. 369 (December 1933), 243-277 (p.270).
- ¹⁰²Geoffrey Grigson, 'Authentic and False in the New "Romanticism"', *Horizon*, 17, no. 99 (March 1948), 203-213 (p.207).
- ¹⁰³John Piper, 'England's Early Sculptors' in *The Painter's Object* edited by Myfanwy Evans (London, 1937), p.125.
- ¹⁰⁴David Jones, 'Eric Gill as Sculptor' in *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings by David Jones*, edited by Harman Grisewood (London, 1959), p.294.
- ¹⁰⁵Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, p.136.
- ¹⁰⁶Philip Pacey, *David Jones and Other Wonder Voyagers: Essays by Philip Pacey* (Bridgend, 1982), p.115.
- ¹⁰⁷Paul Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', *Country Life*, 83, no. 2157 (May 1938), 526-527 (p.527).
- ¹⁰⁸Paul Nash, 'For But Not With', *Axis: a Quarterly Review of Contemporary "Abstract" Painting and Sculpture*, edited by Myfanwy Evans, no. 1 (January 1935), 24-26 (pp.25-26).
- ¹⁰⁹Herbert Read, *Paul Nash* (Harmondsworth, 1944), p.10.

¹¹⁰Nash, *Unit I*, p.81.

¹¹¹Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', p.526.

¹¹²John Piper, 'Prehistory from the Air', *Axis*, no. 8 (Winter 1937), 4-9 (p.5). See David Jones, 'Art in Relation to War', in *The Dying Gaul and Other Writings*, edited with an introduction by Harman Grisewood (London, 1978). Jones claims that 'some of Picasso's paintings of many years ago indicate forms and a disposal of shapes now seen by everyone in aerial photography' (p.137, n.12).

¹¹³John Piper, 'Abstraction on the Beach', *XX^e Siècle*, no. 3 (July 1938), 41 (p.41).

¹¹⁴Charles Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939* (London, 1981), p.319.

¹¹⁵John Piper, 'Lost a Valuable Object' in *The Painter's Object*, p.73.

¹¹⁶Paul Nash, 'The Personality of Planes', *Vogue* (March 1942), 42-43, continued on 76 (p.43).

¹¹⁷John Piper, 'Pleasing Decay' in *Buildings and Prospects* (London, 1948), p.92.

¹¹⁸Spengler, I, 254.

¹¹⁹W.R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Nature and Magic*, with a biographical note by A. Powell (London, 1956), pp.140-141.

¹²⁰Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Leaves of Southwell* (Harmondsworth, 1945), pp.66-67. Worringer had claimed towards the end of *Form in Gothic*:

With mysticism, therefore, the sensuous element makes its appearance in Gothic, although at first it was so slight and subtle that it manifests itself merely as super-sensuousness. This sensuous-super-sensuousness of advanced Gothic is best described as the lyrical element of Gothic. The springtime of the soul becomes the springtime of the senses, the delight in the ego, a delight in nature, and a world of lyric exuberance is awakened. It is the most intimate, most delicate drama which the evolution of Gothic offers to our observation, to watch how this new lyric element in Gothic makes a compromise with the old, rigid, non-naturalistic will to form proper to its constitution, gradually clothing with bud and blossom the rigid world of abstract forms. At first, there is a shy play round the old rigid forms, then a more intimate cajolery, until finally they are completely merged in a charming, lyrically tinged naturalism. The capitals become flowery wonders, there is no end to the luxuriance of creeping tendrils, and the tracery, once so formally and geometrically planned, develops into a marvellous world of bud and blossom. Within the chaos of stiff lines there now develops a chaos of bloom. Thus ornament also travels the road from the abstract scholasticism of its early period to the sensuous-super-sensuous mysticism of the late Gothic period. (pp.176-177)

¹²¹Quoted in Piper, 'Pleasing Decay', p.93. See also O.G.S. Crawford, 'The Work of Giants', *Antiquity: a Quarterly Review of Archaeology*, 10, no. 38 (June 1936), 162-174 (p.162).

- ¹²²John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (Harmondsworth, 1964; first published 1929), p.128.
- ¹²³John Cowper Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality* (London, 1930), p.42.
- ¹²⁴Quoted in *Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by G. Keynes (London, 1927), p.181.
- ¹²⁵Geoffrey Grigson, *Painted Caves* (London, 1957), pp.90-91.
- ¹²⁶Robin Ironside, *Painting Since 1939* (London, 1947), p.14.
- ¹²⁷Geoffrey Grigson, 'Comment on England', *Axis*, no. 1 (January 1935), 8-10 (p.8).
- ¹²⁸Grigson, 'Authentic and False in the New "Romanticism"', pp.211-212.
- ¹²⁹Wyndham Lewis, *Wyndham Lewis the Artist: from 'Blast' to Burlington House* (London, 1939), p.15.
- ¹³⁰Pevsner, *The Englishness of English Art*, p.206.
- ¹³¹Simon Heffer, 'On the Trail of the Holy Vandals' in *Daily Telegraph (Weekend Section)*, 8 December 1990, 1 (p.1).
- ¹³²Worringer, *Form in Gothic*, p.181.

Notes For Chapter Four

- ¹³³Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism: with Other Essays*, translated by J.F. Scanlan (London, 1930), p.22. The first English edition was translated from the original French edition, *Art et Scholastique* (Paris, 1920), by Revd. John O' Connor in 1923 and entitled *The Philosophy of Art*. Five hundred were printed on hand-made paper at Eric Gill's St. Dominic's Press, Ditchling, Sussex. It had on the cover a woodcut by David Jones.
- ¹³⁴Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas Aquinas: Angel of the Schools*, translated by J.F. Scanlan (London, 1931), p.90.
- ¹³⁵Jacques Maritain, *Religion and Culture: Essays in Order No. 1*, translated by J.F. Scanlan with an introduction to *Essays in Order* by Christopher Dawson (London, 1931), pp.xviii-xix.
- ¹³⁶Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p.112.
- ¹³⁷James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Harmondsworth, 1975; first published 1916), p.212.
- ¹³⁸Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, pp.123-124.
- ¹³⁹Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London, 1927), p.246.
- ¹⁴⁰Jacques Maritain, *Art and Poetry*, translated by E. de P. Matthews (London, 1945), pp.63-64.
- ¹⁴¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, translated by R.J. Hollingdale (Cambridge, 1982), p.117.

¹⁴²Wilhelm Worringer, 'Art Questions of the Day', *Monthly Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 6, no. 2 (August 1927), 101-117 (p.112).

¹⁴³The style referred to here by Worringer – note its equivalence to his depiction of a late-Gothic sensibility – formed the subject of the Tate Gallery exhibition 'On Classic Ground' which aimed to divert attention from conceptions of European Modernism as unrelentingly abstract and to draw attention to a tradition of naturalistic and figurative expression whose inspirations were unashamedly located in the Classical world and the Renaissance. See Elizabeth Cowling and Jennifer Mundy, *On Classic Ground: Picasso, Leger, de Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930* (London, 1990).

¹⁴⁴Hegel, I, 60.

¹⁴⁵Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, containing the *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* and *Critique of Teleological Judgement*, translated by J.C. Meredith (Oxford, 1952), p.33.

¹⁴⁶Hegel, I, 58.

¹⁴⁷Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, quoted in Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin, *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (New York, 1973), p.147.

¹⁴⁸Hegel, I, 56-57.

¹⁴⁹Janik and Toulmin, p.147.

¹⁵⁰Roger Scruton, *Kant* (Oxford, 1982), p.89.

¹⁵¹Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p.126.

¹⁵²His new reading of Kant would in turn cast a modern credibility on Thomistic thought. See, however, Maritain's *St. Thomas Aquinas*. The ambiguity of Maritain's philosophical position can be exemplified here by referring to a statement in which he condemns precisely this manoeuvre. Claiming that all modern philosophical researches abandoned any attempt 'to know the primary Cause and immaterial realities' (p.93), he notes that 'there is a way of studying St. Thomas which consists of reading Kant, Bergson and Blondel...so as to throw light upon St. Thomas – the light of modern philosophy – and to discern everything he received from his predecessors, everything he added to them, everything he received from himself and added to himself in the course of his individual evolutive progress' (p.120). Despite protestations that 'this method, taken as a rule of intellectual discipline, is useless and sterile' (p.120), it is clear that Maritain's own method attempts to yoke together what he considers here to be such mutually exclusive philosophies – rendering doubtful a simple and unalloyed loyalty to any one position alone.

¹⁵³Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry: the A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts* (New York, 1974; first published 1953), p.298, n.11.

¹⁵⁴See, however, *Art and Scholasticism* which anticipates, within its formalistic parameters, such an anthropomorphic and naturalistic conception of the Gothic structure. Claiming that art 'must be steeped in logic; not in the pseudo-logic of clear ideas, not in the logic of knowledge and

demonstration, but in the working logic of every day, eternally mysterious and disturbing, the logic of the structure of the living thing, and the intimate geometry of nature' (p.52), he states that 'our Lady of Chartres is as much a marvel of logic as the Summa of St. Thomas: flamboyant Gothic itself is opposed to stucco, and the richness of ornament in which it squanders itself is the same extravagance as the elaborate and contorted syllogisms of the logicians of the period...there is living logic, like the logic of the orogeny of the Alps or the anatomy of man' (pp.52-53). The Cathedral analysed in terms of its 'living logic', examined as an anatomical trope of the human form, conceived as an abstract floriation of an aesthetic volition rooted in an organic fundament: these are all ideas which we have seen descended from Hegelian and ultimately Kantian sources and which belie an ostensive objectivism on Maritain's part.

¹⁵⁵See Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, p.81.

¹⁵⁶See Umberto Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, translated by Hugh Bredin (London, 1986). Eco claims:

the interpretation of *visio* as an intellectual intuition of the sensible, an interpretation connected with the theory that artistic intuition is a *schéma dynamique*, leads insensibly to a conflation of Thomism with Bergsonism. Only the skill and ardour of Maritain's presentation can make this seem, at first sight, acceptable and it is only in his more recent *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* that Maritain gets rid of this ambiguity. Here we find a distinctive aesthetics in which Thomistic influences become a lesson from history which is assimilated freely. (p.128)

¹⁵⁷Eco, p.128.

¹⁵⁸Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, p.63.

¹⁵⁹Nietzsche, p.218.

¹⁶⁰Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, p.87.

¹⁶¹Herbert Read, *Form in Modern Poetry: Essays in Order No. 11* (London, 1932), p.8.

¹⁶²Quoted in Read, *Form in Modern Poetry*, p.37.

¹⁶³See Eliot's review of Herbert Read's *Reason and Romanticism* and Ramon Fernandez's *Messages*, *New Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 4, no. 4 (October 1926), 751-757 (p.755).

¹⁶⁴John Middleton Murry, 'Towards a Synthesis', *Monthly Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 5, no. 3 (June 1927), 294-313 (p.297).

¹⁶⁵T.S. Eliot, 'Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis', *Monthly Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 6, no. 4 (October 1927), 340-347 (p. 341).

¹⁶⁶Reverend M.C. D'Arcy, 'The Thomistic Synthesis and Intelligence', *Monthly Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 6, no. 3 (September 1927), 210-228 (p.210).

¹⁶⁷Ramon Fernandez, 'A Note on Intelligence and Intuition' translated by T.S. Eliot, *Monthly Criterion*, edited by T.S. Eliot, 6, no. 4 (October 1927), 332-339 (p.332).

¹⁶⁸See Eliot's review of Herbert Read's *Reason and Romanticism* and Ramon Fernandez's *Messages*, p.755.

Notes For Chapter Five

¹⁶⁹David Blamires, *David Jones*, Catalogue for the Austin/Desmond Fine Art Gallery Exhibition (London, 1989), p.2.

¹⁷⁰Quoted in Jonathan Miles, *Backgrounds to David Jones: a Study in Sources and Drafts* (Cardiff, 1990), p.14. See also Maritain, *The Philosophy of Art*, pp.83-84.

¹⁷¹Miles, p.14.

¹⁷²Miles, p.43. See also Jacques Maritain, *The Philosophy of Art*, pp.111-112.

¹⁷³Jones, 'The Utile', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.183.

¹⁷⁴Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.44.

¹⁷⁵Herbert Read, *Contemporary British Art* (Harmondsworth, 1951), p.39.

¹⁷⁶Quoted by Read in *Contemporary British Art*, p.36, n. The Letter (to The Listener Magazine, 3 August 1950) is also anthologized as 'Abstract Art' in Jones, *Epoch and Artist*, pp.265-266.

¹⁷⁷Read, *Contemporary British Art*, pp.36-37.

¹⁷⁸Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist*, p.158.

¹⁷⁹Jones, 'The Arthurian Legend' in *Epoch and Artist*, p.210. See also David Jones's 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist*, where he describes the creation of a birthday cake as an act that is as non-reflective as birth itself, yet significant of eternal truths:

There is making, there is added making, there is explicit sign, there is a showing forth, a re-presenting, a recalling and there is gratuitousness and there is full intention to make this making thus. Moreover this particular making signifies a birth. It recalls a past event and looks back at some anniversaries and looks forward to future anniversaries, it is essentially celebrative and festal: it would be gay. For as Poussin said of another art: 'The goal of painting is delight.' And this is universally true of all art no matter how difficult it is to posit the delight. But this making, though joyful and celebrative of a birthday, recalls also, by implication, a day, or many days, of at least some degree of acute pain, perhaps of great anguish, and, perhaps, even of death. So that this making covers, in a rudimentary way, or contains in embryo, all that is shown forth in the greatest

imaginable art-works. I mean no art can compass more than that attempted in the line of the Sequence for Easter Day: *Mors et vita duello conflixere mirando*. (p.164)

¹⁸⁰David Jones, *The Anathemata: Fragments of an Attempted Writing* (London, 1952), p.29. Compare to Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, where he claims:

Be it a painting or a poem, this work is a made object – in it alone does poetic intuition come to objectivization. And it must always preserve its own consistence and value as an *object*. But at the same time it is a sign – both a *direct* sign of the secrets perceived in things, of some irrecusable truth of nature or adventure caught in the great universe, and a *reversed sign* of the subjective universe of the poet, of his substantial Self obscurely revealed. Just as things grasped by poetic intuition abound in significance, just as being swarms with signs, so the work also will swarm with meanings, and will say more than it is, and will deliver to the mind, at one stroke, the universe in a human countenance...The work will make present to our eyes, together with itself, something else, and still something else, and still something else indefinitely, in the infinite mirrors of analogy. (pp.93-94)

¹⁸¹See Maritain's *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, where he claims 'that poetry captures the secret senses of things, and the all-embracing sense, still more secret, of subjectivity obscurely revealed: in order to throw both into a matter to be formed' (p.94).

¹⁸²Ananda Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (Massachusetts, 1934), pp.79-80. For Coomaraswamy, the notion of *Einfühlung* can only exist nominally in a world he believes to be constituted of objective essences: 'If we do sometimes say that a work lives, this is only metaphorical, a sort of animism which projects our own living reactions into the thing as it is in itself' (p.73).

¹⁸³Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist*, p.165.

¹⁸⁴Jones, *The Anathemata*, p.12.

¹⁸⁵Jones, 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist*, p.160.

¹⁸⁶See Elizabeth Ward, *David Jones: Myth-Maker* (Manchester, 1983). Ward confirms such a conclusion with reference to *The Anathemata*, as part of a wider argument that Jones should not be received as an inflexibly doctrinal 'incarnational' poet following Aristotle and St. Thomas, but as a myth-maker in line with the researches of Jung and Freud and the visionary creativity of such poets as Yeats and Edwin Muir:

David Jones had developed, under the combined influence of Spengler, modern symbolist theory and Catholic sacramental theology, an essentially mythological understanding of history:

subjective, absolute, apocalyptic, patterned according to fixed analogies and dependent upon a belief in the supremacy of non-rational perception. From this point of view, Western Christianity fits into the schema in a merely exemplary or illustrative way, regardless of the extent to which, for other reasons, David Jones gave his personal allegiance to the Catholic Church. (p.126)

¹⁸⁷Jones, 'Use and Sign', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.184.

¹⁸⁸Jones, 'Art and Sacrament', in *Epoch and Artist*, pp.159-160.

¹⁸⁹Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: a Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London, 1952; first published 1948), p.169.

¹⁹⁰Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', in *Epoch and Artist*, pp.234-235. The idea is again of depth and recession, of that which precedes the factual and objective conclusions of the intellect:

The *matière de Bretagne* (if one may borrow an expression used since the twelfth century of the literary and romantic Arthurian deposits and apply it to the whole of our inherited mythus) is a very mixed affair. Any tradition is wanting which springs, for instance, from any one of the pivotal landings separately insisted upon, whether that of William or Augustine or Horsa or Caesar. For before any of these there were various other pivotal landings, quasi-Celtic, Celtic, pre-Aryan perhaps; it is always a case of before and before again. (p.231)

¹⁹¹René Hague, *A Commentary on The Anathemata of David Jones* (Wellingborough, 1977), p.11.

¹⁹²Jones 'Art and Sacrament', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.167.

¹⁹³David Jones, *In Parenthesis* (London, 1937), p.xi.

¹⁹⁴Jones, 'Wales and Visual Form', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.75.

¹⁹⁵Jones, *The Anathemata*, p.20.

¹⁹⁶Jones, 'A London Artist Looks at Contemporary Wales', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.38.

¹⁹⁷Jeremy Hooker, *Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970-1981* (Manchester, 1982), p.59. See also the preface to *The Anathemata*:

The forms and materials which the poet uses, his images and the meanings he would give to those images, his perceptions, what is evoked, invoked or incanted, is in some way or other, to some degree or other, essentially bound up with the particular historic complex to which he, together with each other member of that complex, belongs. But, for the poet, the woof and warp, the texture, feel, ethos, the whole *matière* comprising that complex comprises also, or in part comprises, the actual material of his art. (p.19)

- 198 Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, p.215.
- 199 Jones, 'A London Artist Looks at Contemporary Wales', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.38.
- 200 Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.46.
- 201 Jones, 'The Dying Gaul', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.58.
- 202 Jones, 'Wales and Visual Form', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.87, n.16.
- 203 Jones, 'A London Artist Looks at Contemporary Wales', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.38.
- 204 Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s' in *The Dying Gaul*, pp.44-45.
- 205 Jones, 'Wales and Visual Form', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.89.
- 206 Jones, 'Use and Sign', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.181.
- 207 Coomaraswamy, p.64.
- 208 Jones, *The Anathemata*, p.10.
- 209 David Jones, *The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments* (London, 1974), p.9.
- 210 Jones, 'Use and Sign', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.180.
- 211 Jones, 'The Utile', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.184.
- 212 Jones, 'Use and Sign', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.182.
- 213 Hegel, II, 688. Hegel, applying his dialectic to symbolic architecture, had noted: 'It has been necessary here to mention this double starting point of architecture from (a) real needs and (b) purposeless independence, because the truth is the unity of these two principles' (II, 659).
- 214 Jones, 'Religion and the Muses', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.99. See my Chapter Three for Enoch Powell's attitude toward the Norman treatment of Saxon ecclesiastical architecture.
- 215 Jones, 'Welshness in Wales', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.52.
- 216 Jones, 'Past and Present', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.139.
- 217 Jones, 'The Dying Gaul', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.55.
- 218 Jones, 'A Note on Mr. Berenson's Views', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.270.
- 219 Jones, 'An Aspect of the Art of England', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.60.
- 220 Jones, *The Anathemata*, p.21.
- 221 Quoted in Miles, p.54. See also Spengler, I, 354.
- 222 Quoted in Miles, p.54.
- 223 Jones, 'A Note on Mr. Berenson's Views', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.269.
- 224 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p.17.
- 225 Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.241.
- 226 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p.110.
- 227 Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, p.223.
- 228 Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p.59.
- 229 Jones, 'An Aspect of the Art of England', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.59.

²³⁰Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p.52.

²³¹Jones, *The Roman Quarry and Other Sequences*, edited by Harman Grisewood and René Hague (London, 1981), p. 218.

²³²Jones, 'The Heritage of Early Britain', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.200.

²³³Pacey, p.46.

²³⁴Jones, *The Roman Quarry*, p.219.

²³⁵Jones, 'The Heritage of Early Britain', in *Epoch and Artist*, pp.200-201.

²³⁶Jones 'The Arthurian Legend', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.205.

²³⁷Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.237.

²³⁸T.E. Hulme, for example, envisaged just such a revived classical spirit. Robert Graves states in *The White Goddess*:

Then came the early Greek philosophers who were strongly opposed to magical poetry as threatening their new religion of logic, and under their influence a rational poetic language (now called the Classical) was elaborated in honour of their patron Apollo and imposed on the world as the last word in spiritual illumination: a view that has prevailed practically ever since in European schools and universities, where myths are now studied only as quaint relics of the nursery age of mankind. (p.10)

²³⁹Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, p.68.

²⁴⁰Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.243. See also Robert Graves who, like Jones, draws attention to a mythic archetype whose associations pre-date yet anticipate the Christian Creed. Graves, for instance, refers to 'the derivation of the Arthur cult from the Eastern Mediterranean by way of the Amber Route, the Baltic and Denmark, between 1600 and 1400 B.C.' (p.110).

²⁴¹Jones, 'The Myth of Arthur', in *Epoch and Artist*, pp.235-236.

²⁴²Ward, p.197.

²⁴³Jones, 'Past and Present', in *Epoch and Artist*, p.141.

²⁴⁴Jones, *The Sleeping Lord*, pp.71-72.

²⁴⁵Jones, 'Notes on the 1930s', in *The Dying Gaul*, p.48.

²⁴⁶Nicolette [sic] Gray, 'David Jones', *Signature: a Quadrimetrial of Typography and Graphic Arts*, edited by Oliver Simon, no. 8 (1949), 46-56 (p.52).

²⁴⁷Jones, *In Parenthesis*, p.xiv.

²⁴⁸An extract from a summation of Ward's assessment of David Jones to be found on the dust-jacket of *David Jones: Myth-Maker*.

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